THE VALIANTS OF VIRGINIA

BY

HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES

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(Mrs. Post Wheeler)

The Kingdom of Slender Swords
Satan Sanderson
Tales From Dickens
The Castaway
Hearts Courageous
A Furnace of Earth

THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
INDIANAPOLIS

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(Mrs. Post Wheeler)

ILLUSTRATED BY

ANDRÉ CASTAIGNE

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TO

THE REAL JOHN

"Molly, Molly Bright!
Can I get there by candle-light?"

"Yes, if your legs are long enough."

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THE VALIANTS OF VIRGINIA

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CHAPTER I

THE CRASH

"FAILED!" ejaculated John Valiant blankly, and the hat he held dropped to the claret-colored rug like a huge white splotch of sudden fright. "The Corporation — failed!"

The young man was the glass of fashion, from the silken ribbon on the spotless Panama to his pearl-gray gaiters, and well favored — a lithe stalwart figure, with wide-set hazel eyes and strong brown hair waving back from a candid forehead. The soft straw, however, had been wrung to a wisp between clutching fingers and the face was glazed in a kind of horrified and assiduous surprise, as if the rosy peach of life, bitten, had suddenly revealed itself an unripe persimmon. The very words themselves came with a galvanic twitch and a stagger that conveyed a sense at once of shock and of protest. Even the white bulldog stretched on the

floor, nose between paws and one restless eye on his master in a troubled wonder that any one should prefer to forsake the ecstatic sunshine of the street, with its thousand fascinating scents and cross-trails, for a stuffy business office, lifted his wrinkling pink nose and snuffled with acute and hopeful inquiry.

Never had John Valiant's innocuous and butterfly existence known a surprise more startling. He had swung into the room with all the nonchalant habits, the ingrained certitude of the man born with achievement ready-made in his hands. And a single curt statement — like the ruthless blades of a pair of shears — had snipped across the one splendid scarlet thread in the woof that constituted life as he knew it. He had knotted his lavender scarf that morning a vice-president of the Valiant Corporation — one of the greatest and most successful of modern-day organizations; he sat now in the fading afternoon trying to realize that the huge fabric, without warning, had toppled to its fall.

With every nerve of his six feet of manhood in rebellion, he rose and strode to the half-opened window, through which sifted the smell of growing things — for the great building fronted the square — and the soft alluring moistness of early spring. "Failed!" he repeated helplessly, and the echo seemed to go flittering about the substantial walls like a derisive India-rubber bat on a spree.

The bulldog sat up, thumping the rug with a

vibrant tail. There was some mistake, surely; one went out by the door, not by the window! He rose, picked up the Panama in his mouth, and padding across the rug, poked it tentatively into his master's hand. But no, the hand made no response. Clearly they were not to go out, and he dropped it and went puzzledly back and lay down with pricked ears, while his master stared out into the foliaged day.

How solid and changeless it had always seemed — that great business fabric woven by the father he could so dimly remember! His own invested fortune had been derived from the great corporation the elder Valiant had founded and controlled until his death. With almost unprecedented earnings, it had stood as a very Gibraltar of finance, a type and sign of brilliant organization. Now, on the heels of a trust's dissolution which would be a nine-days' wonder, the vast structure had crumpled up like a cardboard. The rains had descended and the floods had come, and it had fallen!

The man at the desk had wheeled in his revolving chair and was looking at the trim athletic back blotting the daylight, with a smile that was little short of a covert sneer. He was one of the local managers of the Corporation whose ruin was to be that day's sensation, a colorless man who had acquired middle age with his first long trousers and had been dedicated to the commercial treadmill be-

fore he had bought a safety-razor. He despised all loiterers along the primrose paths, and John Valiant was but a decorative figurehead.

The bulldog lifted his head. The ghost of a furred throaty growl rumbled in the silence, and the man at the desk shrank a little, as the hair rippled up on the thick neck and the faithful red-rimmed eyes opened a shade wider. But John Valiant did not turn. He was bitterly absorbed with his own thoughts.

Till this moment he had never really known how proud he had always been of the Corporation, of the fact that he was its founder's son. His election to high office in the small coterie that controlled its destinies he had known very well to be but the modern concrete expression of his individual holdings, but it had nevertheless deeply pleased him. The fleeting sense of power, the intimate touching of wide issues in a city of Big Things had flattered him; for a while he had dreamed of playing a great part, of pushing the activities of the Corporation into new territory, invading foreign soil. He might have done much, for he had begun with good equipment. He had read law, had even been admitted to the bar. But to what had it come? A gradual slipping back into the rut of careless amusement, the tacit assumption of his prerogatives by other waiting hands. The huge wheels had continued to turn, smoothly, inevitably, and he had

drawn his dividends . . . and that was all. John Valiant swallowed something that was very like a sob.

As he stood trying to plumb the depth of the calamity, self-anger began to stir and buzz in his heart like a great bee. Like a tingling X-ray there went stabbing through the husk woven of a thousand inherent habits the humiliating knowledge of his own uselessness. In those profitless seasons through which he had sauntered, as he had strolled through his casual years of college, he had given least of his time and thought to the concern which had absorbed his father's young manhood. He, John Valiant — one of its vice-presidents! waster, on whose expenditures there had never been a limit, who had strewn with the foolish free-handedness of a prodigal! Idler, with a reputation in three cities as a leader of cotillions!

"Fool!" he muttered under his breath, and on the landscape outside the word stamped itself on everything as though a thousand little devils had suddenly turned themselves into letters of the alphabet and were skipping about in fours.

Valiant started as the other spoke at his elbow. He, too, had come to the window and was looking down at the pavement. "How quickly some news spreads!"

For the first time the young man noted that the street below was filling with a desultory crowd.

He distinguished a knot of Italian laborers talking with excited gesticulations — a smudged plasterer, tools in hand,— clerks, some hatless and with thin alpaca coats — all peering at the voiceless front of the great building, and all, he imagined, with a thriving fear in their faces. As he watched, a woman, coarsely dressed, ran across the street, her handkerchief pressed to her eyes.

"The notice has gone up on the door," said the manager. "I sent word to the police. Crowds are ugly sometimes."

Valiant drew a sudden sharp breath. The Corporation down in the mire, with crowds at its doors ready to clamor for money entrusted to it, the aggregate savings of widow and orphan, the piteous hoarded sums earned by labor over which pinched sickly faces had burned the midnight oil!

The older man had turned back to the desk to draw a narrow typewritten slip of paper from a pigeonhole. "Here," he said, "is a list of the bonds of the subsidiary companies recorded in your name. These are all, of course, engulfed in the larger failure. You have, however, your private fortune. If you take my advice, by the way," he added significantly, "you'll make sure of keeping that."

"What do you mean?" John Valiant faced him quickly.

The other laughed shortly. "'A word to the

wise,'" he quoted. "It's very good living abroad. There's a boat leaving to-morrow."

A dull red sprang into the younger face. "You mean —"

"Look at that crowd down there — you can hear them now. There'll be a legislative investigation, of course. And the devil'll get the hindmost." He struck the desk-top with his hand. "Have you ever seen the bills for this furniture? Do you know what that rug under your feet cost? Twelve thousand — it's an old Persian. What do you suppose the papers will do to that? Do you think such things will seem amusing to that rabble down there?" His hand swept toward the window. "It's been going on for too many years, I tell you! And now some one'll pay the piper. The lightning won't strike *me* — I'm not tall enough. *You're* a vice-president."

"Do you imagine that *I* knew these things — that I have been a party to what you seem to believe has been a deliberate wrecking?" Valiant towered over him, his breath coming fast, his hands clenched hard.

"You?" The manager laughed again — an unpleasant laugh that scraped the other's quivering nerves like hot sandpaper. "Oh, lord, no! How should you? You've been too busy playing polo and winning bridge prizes. How many board meetings have you attended this year? Your vote

is proxied as regular as clockwork. But you're *supposed* to know. The people down there in the street won't ask questions about patent-leather pumps and ponies; they'll want to hear about such things as rotten irrigation loans in the Stony-River Valley — to market an alkali desert that is the personal property of the president of this Corporation."

Valiant turned a blank white face. "Sedgwick?"

"Yes. You know his principle: 'It's all right to be honest, if you're not too *damn* honest.' He owns the Stony-River Valley bag and baggage. It was a big gamble and he lost."

For a moment there was absolute silence in the room. From outside came the rising murmur of the crowd and cutting through it the shrill cry of a newsboy calling an evening extra. Valiant was staring at the other with a strange look. Emotions to which in all his self-indulgent life he had been a stranger were running through his mind, and outré passions had him by the throat. Fool and doubly blind! A poor pawn, a catspaw raking the chestnuts for unscrupulous men whose ignominy he was now called on, perforce, to share! In his pitiful egotism he had consented to be a figurehead, and he had been made a tool. A red rage surged over him. No one had ever seen on John Valiant's face such a look as grew on it now.

He turned, retrieved the Panama, and without a

word opened the door. The older man took a step toward him — he had a sense of dangerous electric forces in the air — but the door closed sharply in his face. He smiled grimly. "Not crooked," he said to himself; "merely callow. A well-meaning, manicured young fop wholly surrounded by men who knew what they wanted!" He shrugged his shoulders and went back to his chair.

Valiant plunged down in the elevator to the street. Its single other passenger had his nose buried in a newspaper, and over the reader's shoulder he saw the double-leaded head-line: "Collapse of the Valiant Corporation!"

He pushed past the guarded door, and threading the crowd, made toward the curb, where the bulldog, with a bark of delight, leaped upon the seat of a burnished car, rumbling and vibrating with pent-up power. There were those in the sullen anxious crowd who knew whose was that throbbing metal miracle, the chauffeur spick and span from shining cap-visor to polished brown puttees, and recognizing the white face that went past, pelted it with muttered sneers. But he scarcely saw or heard them, as he stepped into the seat, took the wheel from the chauffeur's hand and threw on the gear.

He had afterward little memory of that ride. Once the leaping anger within him jerked the throttle wide and the car responded with a breakneck dart through the startled traffic, till the sight of an

infuriated mounted policeman, baton up, brought him to himself with a thud. He had small mind to be stopped at the moment. His mouth set in a sudden hard sharp line, and under it his hands gripped the slewing wheel to a tearing serpentine rush that sent the skidding monster rearing on side wheels, to swoop between two drays in a hooting plunge down a side street. His tight lips parted then in a ragged laugh, bit off by the jolt of the lurching motor and the slap of the bulging air.

As the sleek rubber shoes spun noiselessly and swiftly along the avenue the myriad lights that were beginning to gleam wove into a twinkling mist. He drove mechanically past a hundred familiar things and places: the particular chop-house of which he was an habitué — the ivied wall of his favorite club, with the cluster of faces at the double window — the florist's where daily he stopped for his knot of Parma violets — but he saw nothing, till the massive marble fronts of the upper park side ceased their mad dance as the car halted before a tall iron-grilled doorway with wide glistening steps, between windows strangely shuttered and dark.

He sprang out and touched the bell. The heavy oak parted slowly; the confidential secretary of the man he had come to face stood in the gloomy doorway.

"I want to see Mr. Sedgwick."

"You can't see him, Mr. Valiant."

"But I *will!*" Sharp passion leaped into the young voice. "He must speak to me."

The man in the doorway shook his head. "He won't speak to anybody any more," he said. "Mr. Sedgwick shot himself two hours ago."

CHAPTER II

VANITY VALIANT

"THE witness is excused."

In the ripple that stirred across the court room at the examiner's abrupt conclusion, John Valiant, who had withstood that pitiless hail of questions, rose, bowed to him and slowly crossed the cleared space to his counsel. The chairman looked severely over his eye-glasses, with his gavel lifted, and a statuesque girl, in the rear of the room, laid her delicately gloved hand on a companion's and smiled slowly without withdrawing her gaze, and with the faintest tint of color in her face.

Katharine Fargo neither smiled nor flushed readily. Her smile was an index of her whole personality, languid, symmetrical, exquisitely perfect. The little group with whom she sat looked somewhat out of place in that mixed assemblage. They had not gasped at the tale of the Corporation's unprecedented earnings, the lavish expenditure for its palatial offices. The recital of the tragic waste, the nepotism, the mole-like ramifications by which the vast structure had been undermined, had left them rather amusedly and satirically appreciative.

Smartly groomed and palpably members of a set to whom John Valiant was a familiar, they had had only friendly nods and smiles for the young man at whom so many there had gazed with jaundiced eyes.

To the general public which read its daily newspaper perhaps none of the gilded set was better known than "Vanity Valiant." The very nickname — given him by his fellows in facetious allusion to a flippant newspaper paragraph laying at his door the alleged new fashion of a masculine vanity-box — had taken root in the fads and elegancies he affected. The new Panhard he drove was the smartest car on the avenue, and the collar on the white bulldog that pranced or dozed on its leather seat sported a diamond buckle. To the space-writers of the social columns, he had been a perennial inspiration. They had delighted to herald a more or less bohemian gathering, into which he had smuggled this pet, as a "dog-dinner"; and when one midnight, after a staid and stodgy "bridge," in a gust of wild spirits he had, for a wager, jumped into and out of a fountain on a deserted square, the act, dished up by a night-hawking reporter had, the following Sunday, inspired three metropolitan sermons on "The Idle Rich." The patterns of his waistcoats, and the splendors of his latest bachelors' dinner at Sherry's — with such items the public had been kept sufficiently familiar. To it, he stood a perfect symbol

of the eider ease and insolent display of inherited wealth. And the great majority of those who had found place in that roomy chamber to listen to the ugly tale of squandered millions, looked at him with a resentment that was sharpened by his apparent nonchalance.

For the failure of the concern upon which a legislature had now turned the search-light of its inquiry, might to him have been a thing of trivial interest, and the present task an alien one, which he must against his will go through with. Often his eyes had wandered to the window, through which came the crisp *clip-trip-clop* of the cab horses on the asphalt, the irritant clang of trolleys and the monstrous panther purr of motors. Only once had this seeming indifference been shaken: when the figures of the salary voted the Corporation's chief officers had been sardonically cited — when in the tense quiet a woman had laughed out suddenly, a harsh jeering note quickly repressed. For one swift second then Valiant's gaze had turned to the rusty black gown, the flushed face of the sleeping child against the tawdry fall of the widow's veil. Then the gaze had come back, and he was once more the abstracted spectator, boredly waiting his release.

Long before the closing session it had been clear that, as far as indictments were concerned, the investigation would be barren of result. Of indi-

vidual criminality, flight and suicide had been confession, but more sweeping charges could not be brought home. The gilded fool had not brought himself into the embarrassing purview of the law. This certainty, however, had served to goad the public and sharpen the satire of the newspaper paragraphist; and the examiner, who incidentally had a reputation of his own to guard, knew his cue. There were possibilities for the exercise of his especial gifts in a vice-president of the Corporation who was also Vanity Valiant, the decorative idler of social fopperies and sumptuous clothes.

Valiant took the chair with a sensation almost of relief. Since that day when he had spun downtown in his motor to that sharp enlightenment, his daily round had gone on as usual, but beneath the habitual pose, the worldly mask of his class, had lain a sore sensitiveness that had cringed painfully at the sneering word and the envenomed paragraph. Always his mental eye had seen a white-faced crowd staring at a marble building, a coarsely-dressed woman crossing the street with a handkerchief pressed to her face.

And mingling with the sick realization of his own inadequacy had woven panging thoughts of his father. The shattered bits of recollection of him that he had preserved had formed a mosaic which had pictured the hero of his boyhood. Yet his father's name would now go down, linked not to

success and achievement, but to failure, to chicanery, to the robbing of the poor. The thought had become a blind ache that had tortured him. Beneath the old characteristic veneer it had been working a strange change. Something old had been dying, something new budding under the careless exterior of the man who now faced his examiner in the big armchair that May afternoon.

John Valiant's testimony, to those of his listeners who cherished a sordid disbelief in the ingenuousness of the man who counts his wealth in seven figures, seemed a pose of gratuitous insolence. It had a clarity and simplicity that was almost horrifying. He did not stoop to gloze his own monumental flippancy. He had attended only one directors' meeting during that year. Till after the crash, he had known little, had cared less, about the larger investments of the Corporation's capital: he had left all that to others.

Perhaps to the examiner himself this blunt directness — the bitter unshadowed truth that searched for no evasions — had appeared effrontery: the contemptuous and cynical frankness of the young egoist who sat secure, his own millions safe, on the ruins of the enterprise from which they were derived. The questions, that had been bland with suave innuendo, acquired an acrid sarcasm, a barbed and stinging satire, which at length touched indiscretion. He allowed himself a scornful reference

to the elder Valiant as scathing as it was unjustified.

To the man in the witness-chair this had been like an electric shock. Something new and unguessed beneath the husk of boredom, the indolent pose of body, had suddenly looked from his blazing eyes: something foreign to Vanity Valiant, the club habitué, the spoiled scion of wealth. For a brief five minutes he spoke, in a fashion that surprised the court room — a passionate defense of his father, the principles on which the Corporation had been founded and its traditional policies: few sentences, but each hot as lava and quivering with feeling. Their very force startled the reporters' bench and left his inquisitor for a moment silent.

The latter took refuge in a sardonic reference to the Corporation's salary-list. Did the witness conceive, he asked with effective deliberation, that he had rendered services commensurate with the annual sums paid him? The witness thought that he had, in fact, received just about what those services were worth. Would Mr. Valiant be good enough to state the figures of the salary he had been privileged to draw as a vice-president?

The answer fell as slowly in the sardonic silence. "I have never drawn a salary as an officer of the Valiant Corporation."

Then it was that the irritated examiner had abruptly dismissed the witness. Then the ripple

had swept over the assemblage, and Katharine Fargo, gazing, had smiled that slow smile in which approval struggled with mingled wonder and question.

The jostling crowd flocked out into the square, among them a fresh-faced girl on the arm of a gray-bearded man in black frock coat and picturesque broad-brimmed felt hat. She turned her eyes to his.

"So that," she said, "is John Valiant! I'd almost rather have missed Niagara Falls. I must write Shirley Dandridge about it. I'm so sorry I lost that picture of him that I cut out of the paper."

"I reckon he's not such a bad lot," said her uncle. "I liked the way he spoke of his father."

He hailed a cab. "Grand Central Station," he directed, with a glance at his watch, "and be quick about it. We've just time to make our train."

"Yessir! Dollar'n a half, sir."

The gentleman seated the girl and climbed in himself. "I know the legal fare," he said, "if I *am* from Virginia. And if you try to beat me out of more, you'll be sorry."

Some hours later, in an inner office of a downtown sky-scraper, the newly-appointed receiver of the Valiant Corporation, a heavy, thick-set man with narrow eyes, sat beside a table on which lay a small

black satchel with a padlock on its handle, whose contents — several bundles of crisp papers — he had been turning over in his heavy hands with a look of incredulous amazement. A sheet containing a mass of figures and memoranda lay among them.

The shock was still on his face when a knock came at the door, and a man entered. The newcomer was gray-haired, slightly stooped and lean-jowled, with a humorous expression on his lips. He glanced in surprise at the littered table.

"Fargo," said the man at the desk, "do you notice anything queer about me?"

His friend grinned. "No, Buck," he said judicially, "unless it's that necktie. It would stop a Dutch clock."

"Hang the haberdashery! Read this — from young Valiant." He passed over a letter.

Fargo read. He looked up. "Securities aggregating three millions!" he said in a hushed voice. "Why, unless I've been misinformed, that represents practically all his private fortune."

The other nodded. "Turned over to the Corporation with his resignation as a vice-president, and without a blessed string tied to 'em! What do you think of that?"

"Think! It's the most absurdly idiotic thing I ever met. Two weeks ago, before the investigation . . . but *now,* when it's perfectly certain they can

bring nothing home to him —" He paused. "Of course I suppose it'll save the Corporation, eh? But it may be ten years before its securities pay dividends. And this is real money. Where the devil does *he* come in meanwhile?"

The receiver pursed his lips. "I knew his father," he said. "He had the same crazy quixotic streak."

He gathered the scattered documents and locked them carefully with the satchel in a safe. "Spectacular young ass!" he said explosively.

"I should say so!" agreed Fargo. "Do you know, I used to be afraid my Katharine had a leaning toward him. But thank God, she's a sensible girl!"

CHAPTER III

THE NEVER-NEVER LAND

DUSK had fallen that evening when John Valiant's Panhard turned into a cross-street and circled into the yawning mouth of his garage. Here, before he descended, he wrote a check on his knee with a slobbering fountain-pen.

"Lars," he said to the chauffeur, "as I dare say you've heard, things have not gone exactly smoothly with me lately, and I'm uncertain about my plans. I've made arrangements to turn the car over to the manufacturers, and take back the old one. I must drive myself hereafter. I'm sorry, but you must look for another place."

The dapper young Swede touched his cap gratefully as he looked at the check's figures. Embarrassment was burning his tongue. "I — I've heard, sir. I'm sure it's very kind, sir, and when you need another . . ."

"Thank you, Lars," said Valiant, as he shook hands, "and good luck. I'll remember."

Lars, the chauffeur, looked after him. "Going to skip out, he is! I thought so when he brought that stuff out of the safe-deposit. Afraid they'll try

to take the boodle away from him, I guess. The papers seem to think he's rotten, but he's been a mighty good boss to me. He's a dead swell, all right, anyhow," he added pridefully, as he slid the car to its moorings, "and they'll have to get up early to catch him asleep!"

A little later John Valiant, the bulldog at his heels, ascended the steps of his club, where he lodged — he had disposed of his bachelor apartment a fortnight ago. The cavernous seats of the lounge were all occupied, but he did not pause as he strode through the hall. He took the little pile of letters the boy handed him at the desk and went slowly up the stairway.

He wandered into the deserted library and sat down, tossing the letters on the magazine-littered table. He had suddenly remembered that it was his twenty-fifth birthday.

In the reaction from the long strain he felt physically spent. He thought of what he had done that afternoon with a sense of satisfaction. A reversal of public judgment, in his own case, had not entered his head. He knew his world — its comfortable faculty of forgetting, and the multitude of sins that wealth may cover. To preserve at whatever personal cost the one noble monument his father's genius had reared, and to right the wrong that would cast its gloomy shadow on his name — this had been his only thought. What he had done

would have been done no matter what the outcome of the investigation. But now, he told himself, no one could say the act had been wrung from him. That, he fancied, would have been his father's way.

Fancied — for his recollections of his father were vague and fragmentary. They belonged wholly to his pinafore years. His early memories of his mother were, for that matter, even more unsubstantial. They were of a creature of wonderful dazzling gowns, and more wonderful shining jewels, who lived for the most part in an over-sea city as far away as the moon (he was later to identify this as Paris) and who, when she came home — which was not often — took him driving in the park and gave him chocolate macaroons. He had always held her in more or less awe and had breathed easier when she had departed. She had died in Rome a year later than his father. He had been left then without a near relative in the world and his growing years had been an epic of nurses and caretakers, a boys' school on the continent, and a university course at home. As far as his father was concerned, he had had only his own childish recollections.

He smiled — a slow smile of reminiscence — for there had come to him at that moment the dearest of all those memories — a play of his childhood.

He saw himself seated on a low stool, watching a funny old clock with a moon-face, whose smiling

lips curved up like military mustachios, and wishing the lazy long hands would hurry. He saw himself stealing down a long corridor to the door of a big room strewn with books and papers, that through some baleful and mysterious spell could not be made to open at all hours. When the hands pointed right, however, there was the "Open Sesame"—his own secret knock, two fierce twin raps, with one little lonesome one afterward—and this was unfailing. Safe inside, he saw himself standing on a big, polar-bear-skin rug, the door tight-locked against all comers, an expectant baby figure, with his little hand clasped in his father's. The white rug was the magic entrance to the Never-Never Country, known only to those two.

He could hear his own shrill treble:

"Wishing-House, Wishing-House, where are you?"

Then the deeper voice (quite unrecognizable as his father's) answering:

"Here I am, Master; here I am!"

And instantly the room vanished and they were in the Never-Never Land, and before them reared the biggest house in the world, with a row of white pillars across its front a mile high.

Valiant drew a deep breath. Some magic of time and place was repainting that dead and dusty infancy in sudden delicate lights and filmy colors. What had been but blurred under-exposures on the

retina of his brain became all at once elfin pictures, weird and specter-like as the dissolving views of a camera obscura.

He and his father had lived alone in Wishing-House. No one else had possessed the secret. Not his mother. Not even the more portentous person whom he had thought must own the vast hotel in which they lived (in such respect did she seem to be held by the servants), who wore crackling black silk and a big bunch of keys for a sole ornament, and who had called him her "lamb." No, in the Never-Never Land there had been only his father and he!

Yet they were anything but lonely, for the country was inhabited by good-natured friendly savages, as black as a lump of coal, most of them with curly white hair. These talked a queer language, but of course his father and he could understand them perfectly. These savages had many curious and enthralling customs and strange cuddling songs that made one sleepy, and all these his father knew by heart. They lived in little square huts around Wishing-House, made of sticks, and had dozens and dozens of children who wore no clothes and liked to dance in the sun and eat cherries. They were very useful barbarians, too, for they chopped the wood and built the fires and made the horses' coats shine — for he and his father would have scorned to walk, and went galloping

like the wind everywhere. The forests about were filled with small brown cats, tremendously furry, with long whiskers and sharp, beedy black eyes, and sometimes they would hunt these on horseback; but they never caught them, because the cats could run just a little bit faster than the horses.

Christmas time at home was not so very exciting, but at Wishing-House what a time they had! Then all the savages and their wives and children received presents, and he and his father had a dreadfully scary shivery time remembering them all, because some had so many children they ran out of names and had to use numbers instead. So there was always the harrowing fear that one might inadvertently be left out, and sometimes they couldn't remember the last one till the very final minute. After the Christmas turkey, the oldest and blackest savage of all would come in where his father and he sat at the table, with a pudding as big as the gold chariot in the circus, and the pudding, by some magic spell, would set itself on fire, while he carried it round the table, with all the other savages marching after him. This was the most awe-inspiring spectacle of all. Christmases at other places were a long way apart, but they came as often as they were wanted at Wishing-House, which, he recalled, was very often indeed.

John Valiant felt an odd beating of the heart and a tightening of the throat, for he saw another

scene, too. It was the one hushed and horrible night, after the spell had failed and the door had refused to open for a long time, when dread things had been happening that he could not understand, when a big man with gold eye-glasses, who smelled of some curious sickish-sweet perfume, came and took him by the hand and led him into a room where his father lay in bed, very gray and quiet.

The white hand on the coverlet had beckoned to him and he had gone close up to the bed, standing very straight, his heart beating fast and hard.

"John!" the word had been almost a whisper, very tense and anxious, very distinct. "John, you're a little boy, and father is going away."

"To — to Wishing-House?"

The gray lips had smiled then, ever so little, and sadly. "No, John."

"Take me with you, father! Take me with you, and let us find it!" His voice had trembled then, and he had had to gulp hard.

"Listen, John, for what I am saying is very important. You don't know what I mean now, but sometime you will." The whisper had grown strained and frayed, but it was still distinct. "I can't go to the Never-Never Land. But you may sometime. If you . . . if you do, and if you find Wishing-House, remember that the men who lived in it . . . before you and me . . . were gentlemen. Whatever else they were, they were al-

ways that. Be . . . like them, John . . . will you?"

"Yes, father."

The old gentleman with the eye-glasses had come forward then, hastily.

"Good-night, father—"

He had wanted to kiss him, but a strange cool hush had settled on the room and his father seemed all at once to have fallen asleep. And he had gone out, so carefully, on tiptoe, wondering, and suddenly afraid.

CHAPTER IV

THE TURN OF THE PAGE

JOHN VALIANT stirred and laughed, a little self-consciously, for there had been drops on his face.

Presently he took a check-book from his pocket and began to figure on the stub, looking up with a wry smile. "To come down to brass tacks," he muttered, "when I've settled everything (thank heaven, I don't owe my tailor!) there will be a little matter of twenty-eight hundred odd dollars, a passé motor and my clothes between me and the bread-line!"

Everything else he had disposed of — everything but the four-footed comrade there at his feet. At his look, the white bulldog sprang up whining and made joyful pretense of devouring his master's immaculate boot-laces. Valiant put his hand under the eager muzzle, lifted the intelligent head to his knee and looked into the beseeching amber eyes. "But I'd not sell you, old chap," he said softly; "not a single lick of your friendly pink tongue; not for a beastly hundred thousand!"

He withdrew his caressing hand and looked

again at the check-stub. Twenty-eight hundred! He laughed bleakly. Why, he had spent more than that a month ago on a ball at Sherry's! This morning he had been rich; to-night he was poor! He had imagined this in the abstract, but now of a sudden the fact seemed fraught with such a ghastly and nightmarish ridiculousness as a man might feel who, going to bed with a full thatch of hair, confronts the morning mirror to find himself as bald as a porcelain mandarin.

What could he do? He could not remember a time when he had not had all that he wanted. He had never borrowed from a friend or been dunned by an importunate tradesman. And he had never tried to earn a dollar in his life; as to current methods of making a living, he was as ignorant as a Pueblo Indian.

What did others do? The men he knew who joked of their poverty and their debts, and whose hilarious habit it was to picture life as a desperate handicap in which they were forever "three jumps ahead of the sheriff", somehow managed to cling to their yachts and their stables. Few of his friends had really gone "smash", and of these all but one had taken themselves speedily and decently off. He thought of Rod Creighton, the one failure who had clung to the old life, achieving for a transient period the brilliant success of living on his friends. When this ended he had gone on the road for some

champagne or other. Everybody had ordered from him at the start. But this, too, had failed. He had dropped out of the clubs and there had at last befallen an evil time when he had come to haunt the avenue, as keen for stray quarters as any panhandler. Where was Creighton now, he wondered?

Across the avenue was Larry Treadwell's brokerage office. Larry had a brain for business; as a youthful scamp in knickerbockers he had been as sharp as a steel-trap. But what did he, John Valiant, know of business? Less than of law! Why, he was not fit to smirk behind a counter and measure lace insertion for the petticoats of the women he waltzed with! All he was really fit for was to work with his hands!

He thought of a gang of laborers he had seen that afternoon breaking the asphalt with crowbars. What must it be to toil through the clammy cold of winter and the smothering fur-heat of summer, in some revolting routine of filth and unredeemable ugliness? He looked down at his supple white fingers and shivered.

He rose grimly and dragged his chair facing the window. The night was balmy and he looked down across the darker sea of reefs, barred like a gigantic checker-board by the shining lines of streets, to where the flashing electric signs of the theater district laid their wide swath of colored

radiance. The manifold calls of the street and the buzz of trolleys made a dull tonal background, subdued and far-away.

To be outside! All that light and color and comfort and pleasure would hum and sparkle on just the same, though he was no longer within the circle of its effulgence — slaving perhaps, he thought with a twisted smile, at some tawdry occupation that called for no experience, to pay for a meal in some second-rate restaurant and a pallet in some shabby-genteel, hall bedroom, till his clothes were replaced by ill-fitting "hand-me-downs"— till by wretched gradations he arrived finally at the status of the dime seat in the gallery and five-cent cigars!

There was one way back. It lay through the hackneyed gateway of marriage. Youth, comeliness and fine linen, in the world he knew, were a fair exchange for wealth any day. "Cutlet for cutlet"— the satiric phrase ran through his mind. Why not? Others did so. And as for himself, it perhaps need be no question of plain and spinstered millions — there was Katharine Fargo!

He had known her since a time when she bestrode a small fuzzy pony in the park, cool as a grapefruit and with a critical eye, even in her ten years, for social forms and observances. In the intervals of fashionable boarding-schools he had seen her develop, beautiful, cold, stately and correct. The Fargo fortune — thanks to modern journalism,

which was fond of stating that if the steel rails of the Fargo railways were set end to end, the chain would reach from the earth to the planet Saturn or thereabouts — was as familiar to the public imagination as Caruso or the Hope diamond. And the daughter Katharine had not lacked admirers; shop-girls knew the scalps that dangled from her girdle. But in his heart John Valiant was aware, by those subtle signs which men and women alike distinguish, that while Katharine Fargo loved first and foremost only her own wonderful person, he had been an easy second in her regard.

He remembered the last Christmas house-party at the Fargos' place on the St. Lawrence. Its habitués irreverently dubbed this "The Shack", but it was the nursling of folk who took their camping luxuriously, in a palatial structure which, though built, as to its exterior, of logs, was equipped within with Turkish bath, billiard-room and the most indefatigable chef west of St. Petersburg. The evening before his host's swift motor had hooted him off to the station, as its wide hall exhaled the bouquet of after-dinner cigars, he had looked at her standing in the wide doorway, a rare exquisite creature — her face fore-shortened and touched to a borrowed tenderness by the flickering glow of the burning logs in the room behind — the perfect flower, he had thought, of the civilization in which he lived.

John Valiant looked down at the bulldog squatted on the floor, his eyes shining in the dimness. A little hot ripple had run over him. "Not on your life, Chum!" he said. "No shameless barter! There must be other things besides money and social position in this doddering old world, after all!"

The dog whined with delight at the voice and jumped up to lick the strong tense hand held down to him. "Do you know, old chap," his master continued, "I've been handing myself a collection of cold marble truths in the last few weeks? I've been the prize dolt of the whole show, and you ought to have thrown me over long ago. You've probably realized it all along, but it has never dawned on me until lately. I've worn the blue ribbon so long I'd come to think it was a decoration. All my life I've been just another of those well-meaning, brainless young idiots who have never done a blessed thing that's the slightest value to anybody else. Well, Chum, we're through. We're going to begin doing something for ourselves, if it's only raising cabbages! And we're going to stand it without any baby-aching — the nurse never held our noses when we took our castor-oil!"

It was folded down, that old bright page. *Finis* had been written to the rose-colored chapter. And even as he told himself, he was conscious of a new rugged something that had been slowly dawn-

ing within him, a sense of courage, even of zest, and a furious hatred of the self-pity that had wrenched him even for a moment.

He turned from the window, picked up his letters, and followed by the dog, went slowly up another flight to his room.

CHAPTER V

THE LETTER

HE tore open the letters abstractedly: the usual dinner-card or two, a tailor's spring announcement, a chronic serial from an exclamatory marble-quarrying company, a quarterly statement of a club house-committee. The last two missives bore a nondescript look.

One was small, with the name of a legal firm in its corner. The other was largish, corpulent and heavy, of stout Manila paper, and bore, down one side, a gaudy procession of postage stamps proclaiming that it had been registered.

"What's in that, I wonder?" he said to himself, and then, with a smile at the unmasculine speculation, opened the smaller envelope.

"Dear Sir," began the letter, in the most uncompromisingly conventional of typewriting:

"*Dear Sir:*

"Enclosed please find, with title-deed, a memorandum opened in your name by the late John Valiant some years before his death. It was his desire that the services indicated in connection with this estate should continue till this date. We hand

you herewith our check for $236.20 (two hundred and thirty-six dollars and twenty cents), the balance in your favor, for which please send receipt,

"And oblige,

"Yours very truly,

"(Enclosure) "EMERSON AND BALL."

He turned to the memorandum. It showed a sizable initial deposit against which was entered a series of annual tax payments with minor disbursements credited to "Inspection and care." The tax receipts were pinned to the account.

The larger wrapper contained an unsealed envelope, across which was written in faded ink and in an unfamiliar dashing, slanting handwriting, his own name. The envelope contained a creased yellow parchment, from between whose folds there clumped and fluttered down upon the floor a long flattish object wrapped in a paper, a newspaper clipping and a letter.

Puzzledly he unfolded the crackling thing in his hands. "Why," he said half aloud, "it's — it's a deed made over to me." He overran it swiftly. "Part of an old Colony grant . . . a plantation in Virginia, twelve hundred odd acres, given under the hand of a vice-regal governor in the sixteenth century. I had no idea titles in the United States went back so far as that!" His eye fled to the end. "It was my father's! What could he have wanted of an estate in Virginia? It must

have come into his hands in the course of business."

He fairly groaned. "Ye gods! If it were only Long Island, or even Pike County! The sorriest, out-at-elbow, boulder-ridden, mosquito-stung old rock-farm there would bring a decent sum. But Virginia! The place where the dialect stories grow. The paradise of the Jim-crow car and the hook-worm, where land-poor, clay-colored colonels with goatees sit in green wicker lawn-chairs and watch their shadows go round the house, while they guzzle mint-juleps and cuss at lazy 'cullud pussons.' Where everybody is an F. F. V. and everybody's grandfather was a patroon, or whatever they call 'em, and had a thousand slaves 'befoh de wah'!"

Who ever heard of Virginia nowadays, except as a place people came *from?* The principal event in the history of the state since the Civil War had been the discovery of New York. Its men had moved upon the latter en masse, coming with the halo about them of old Southern names and legends of planter hospitality — and had married Northern women, till the announcement in the marriage column that the fathers of bride and bridegroom had fought in opposing armies at the battle of Manassas had grown as hackneyed as the stereotyped "Whither are we drifting?" editorial. But was Virginia herself anything more, in this twentieth

century, than a hot-blooded, high-handed, prodigal legend, kept alive in the North by the banquets of "Southern Societies" and annual poems on "The Lost Cause"?

He picked up the newspaper clipping. It was worn and broken in the folds as if it had been carried for months in a pocketbook.

"It will interest readers of this section of Virginia (the paragraph began) to learn, from a recent transfer received for record at the County Clerk's Office, that Damory Court has passed to Mr. John Valiant, minor —"

He turned the paper over and found a date; it had been printed in the year of the transfer to himself, when he was six years old — the year his father had died.

"— John Valiant, minor, the son of the former owner.

"There are few indeed who do not recall the tragedy with which in the public mind the estate is connected. The fact, moreover, that this old homestead has been left in its present state (for, as is well known, the house has remained with all its contents and furnishings untouched) to rest during so long a term of years unoccupied, could not, of course, fail to be commented on, and this circumstance alone has perhaps tended to keep alive a melancholy story which may well be forgotten."

He read the elaborate, rather stilted phraseology in the twenty-year-old paper with a wondering interest. "An old house," he mused, "with a bad name. Probably he couldn't sell it, and maybe nobody would even live in it. That would explain why it remained so long unoccupied — why there are no records of rentals. Probably the land was starved and run down. At any rate, in twenty years it would be overgrown with stubble."

Yet, whatever their condition, acres of land were, after all, a tangible thing. This lawyer's firm might, instead, have sent him a bundle of beautifully engraved certificates of stock in some zinc-mine whose imaginary bottom had dropped out ten years ago. Here was real property, in size, at least, a gentleman's domain, on which real taxes had been paid during a long term — a sort of hilarious consolation prize, hurtling to him out of the void like the magic gift of the traditional fairy godmother.

"It's an off-set to the hall-bedroom idea, at any rate," he said to himself humorously. "It holds out an escape from the noble army of rent-payers. When my twenty-eight hundred is gone, I could live down there a landed proprietor, and by the same mark an honorary colonel, and raise the cabbages I was talking about — eh, Chum? — while you stalk rabbits. How does that strike you?"

He laughed whimsically. He, John Valiant, of

New York, first-nighter at its theaters, hail-fellow-well-met in its club corridors and welcome diner at any one of a hundred brilliant glass-and-silver-twinkling supper-tables, entombed on the wreck of a Virginia plantation, a would-be country gentleman, on an automobile and next to nothing a year!

He bethought himself of the fallen letter and possessed himself of it quickly. It lay with the superscription side down. On it was written, in the same hand which had addressed the other envelope:

For my son, John Valiant,
When he reaches the age of twenty-five.

That, then, had been written by his father — and he had died nearly twenty years ago! He broke the seal with a strange feeling as if, walking in some familiar thoroughfare, he had stumbled on a lichened and sunken tombstone.

"When you read this, my son, you will have come to man's estate. It is curious to think that this black, black ink may be faded to gray and this white, white paper yellowed, just from lying waiting so long. But strangest of all is to think that you yourself whose brown head hardly tops this desk, will be as tall (I hope) as I! How I wonder what you will look like then! And shall I — the real, real I, I mean — be peering over your strong broad shoulder as you read? Who knows? Wise men

have dreamed such a thing possible — and I am not a bit wise.

"John, you will not have forgotten that you are a Valiant. But you are also a Virginian. Will you have discovered this for yourself? Here is the deed to the land where I and my father, and his father, and many, many more Valiants before them were born. Sometime, perhaps, you will know why you are John Valiant of New York instead of John Valiant of Damory Court. I can not tell you myself, because it is too true a story, and I have forgotten how to tell any but fairy tales, where everything happens right, where the Prince marries the beautiful Princess and they live happily together ever after.

"You may never care to live at Damory Court. Maybe the life you will know so well by the time you read this will have welded you to itself. If so, well and good. Then leave the old place to your son. But there is such a thing as racial habit, and the call of blood. And I know there is such a thing, too, as fate. 'Every man carries his fate on a rib-and about his neck'; so the Moslem put it. It was my fate to go away, and I know now — since distance is not made by miles alone — that I myself shall never see Damory Court again. But life is a strange wheel that goes round and round and comes back to the same point again and again. And it may be your fate to go back. Then perhaps you will cry (but, oh, not on the old white bear's-skin rug — never again with me holding your small, small hand!)—

"'Wishing-House! Wishing-House! Where are you?'

"And this old parchment deed will answer —

"'Here I am, Master; here I am!'

"Ah, we are only children, after all, playing out our plays. I have had many toys, but O John, John! The ones I treasure most are all in the Never-Never Land!"

CHAPTER VI

A VALIANT OF VIRGINIA

FOR a long time John Valiant sat motionless, the opened letter in his hand, staring at nothing. He had the sensation, spiritually, of a traveler awakened with a rude shock amid wholly unfamiliar surroundings. He had passed through so many conflicting states of emotion that afternoon and evening that he felt numb.

He was trying to remember — to put two and two together. His father had been Southern-born; yes, he had known that. But he had known nothing whatever of his father's early days, or of his forebears; since he had been old enough to wonder about such things, he had had no one to ask questions of. There had been no private papers or letters left for his adult perusal. It had been borne upon him very early that his father's life had not been a happy one. He had seldom laughed, and his hair had been streaked with gray, yet when he died he had been but ten years older than the son was now.

Phrases of the letter ran through his mind:

"Sometime, perhaps, you will know why you are John Valiant of New York instead of John Valiant of Damory Court. . . . I can not tell you myself." There was some tragedy, then, that had blighted the place, some "melancholy story," as the clipping put it.

He bent over the deed spread out upon the table, following with his finger the long line of transfers: "'To John Valyante,'" he muttered; "what odd spelling! 'Robert Valyant'—without the 'e.' Here, in 1730, the 'y' begins to be 'i.'" There was something strenuous and appealing in the long line of dates. "Valiant. Always a Valiant. How they held on to it! There's never a break."

A curious pride, new-born and self-conscious, was dawning in him. He was descended from ancestors who had been no weaklings. A Valiant had settled on those acres under a royal governor, before the old frontier fighting was over and the Indians had sullenly retired to the westward. The sons of those who had braved sea and savages had bowed their strong bodies and their stronger hearts to raze the forests and turn the primeval jungles into golden plantations. Except as regarded his father, Valiant had never known ancestral pride before. He had been proud of his strong and healthy frame, of his ability to ride like a dragoon, unconsciously, perhaps, a little proud of his wealth. But pride in the larger sense, reverence for the past

based upon a respect for ancient lineage, he had never known until this moment.

Where was his facetious concept of Virginia now? He remembered his characterization of it with a wincing half-humorous mortification—a slender needle-prick of shame. The empty pretensions, subsisting on the vanished glories of the past, had suddenly acquired character and meaning. He himself was a Virginian.

There below him stretched the great cañoned city, its avenues roaring with nightly gaiety, its roadways bright with the beams of shuttling motors, its theaters and cafés brilliant with women in throbbing hues and men in black and white, and its "Great White Way" blazing with incandescents, interminable and alluring — an apotheosis of fevered movement and hectic color. He knew suddenly that he was sick of it all: its jostle and glitter, its mad race after bubbles, its hideous under-surface contrasts of wealth and squalor, its lukewarm friendships and false standards which he had been so bitterly unlearning. He knew that, for all his self-pity, he was at heart full of a tired longing for wide uncrowded nature, for green breezy interludes and a sky of untainted sunlight or peaceful stars.

There stole into his mood an eery suggestion of intention. Why should the date assigned for that deed's delivery have been the very day on which

he had elected poverty? Here was a foreordination as pointed as the index-finger of a guide-post. "'Every man carries his fate,'" he repeated, "'on a riband about his neck.' Chum, do you believe in fate?"

For answer the bulldog, cocking an alert eye on his master, discontinued his occupation — a conscientious if unsuccessful mastication of the flattish packet that had fallen from the folded deed — and with much solicitous tail-wagging, brought the sodden thing in his mouth and put it into the outstretched hand.

His master unrolled the pulpy wad and extricated the object it had enclosed — an old-fashioned iron door-key.

After a time Valiant thrust the key into his pocket, and rising, went to a trunk that lay against the wall. Searching in a portfolio, he took out a small old-fashioned photograph, much battered and soiled. It had been cut from a larger group and the name of the photographer had been erased from the back. He set it upright on the desk, and bending forward, looked long at the face it disclosed. It was the only picture he had ever possessed of his father.

He turned and looked into the glass above the dresser. The features were the same, eyes, brow, lips, and strong waving hair. But for its time-

stains the photograph might have been one of himself, taken yesterday.

For an hour he sat in the bright light thinking, the pictured face propped on the desk before him, the dog snuggled against his knee.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE RED ROAD

THE green, mid-May Virginian afternoon was arched with a sky as blue as the tiles of the Temple of Heaven and steeped in a wash of sunlight as yellow as gold: smoke-hazy peaks piling up in the distance billowy verdure like clumps of trembling jade between, shaded with masses of blue-black shadow, and lazying up and down, by gashed ravine and rounded knoll, a road like red lacquer, fringed with stone wall and sturdy shrub and splashed here and there with the purple stain of the Judas-tree and the snow of dogwood blooms. Nothing in all the springy landscape but looked warm and opalescent and inviting — except a tawny bull that from across a barred fence-corner switched a truculent tail in silence and glowered sullenly at the big motor halted motionless at the side of the twisting road.

Curled worm-like in the driver's seat, with his chin on his knees, John Valiant sat with his eyes upon the distance. For an hour he had whirred through that wondrous shimmer of color with a flippant loitering breeze in his face, sweet from the crimson clover that poured and rioted over the

roadside: past nests of meditative farm-buildings, fields of baby-green corn, occasional ramshackle dirt-daubed cabins with doorways hung with yellow honeysuckle and flagrant trumpet-vines, and here and there a quiet old church, Gothic and ivied and gray, whose leaded windows watched benignantly over myrtled graveyards. A great soothing suspiration of peace seemed to swell from it all to lap the traveler like the moist balminess of a semi-tropical sea.

"Chum, old man," said Valiant, with his arm about the bulldog's neck, "if those color-photograph chaps had shown us this, we simply wouldn't have believed it, would we? Such scenery beats the roads we're used to, what? If it were all like this — but of course it isn't. We'll get to our own bailiwick presently, and wake up. Never mind; we're country gentlemen, Chummy, en route to our estate! No silly snuffle, now! Out with it! That's right,"— as a sharp bark rewarded him — "that's the proper enthusiasm." He wound his strong fingers in a choking grip in the scruff of the white neck, as a chipmunk chattered by on the low stone wall. "No, you don't, you cannibal! He's a jolly little beggar, and he doesn't deserve being eaten!"

He filled his brier-wood pipe and drew in great breaths of the fragrant incense. "What a pity you don't smoke, Chum; you miss such a lot! I

saw a poodle once in a circus that did. But he'd been to college. Think how you could think if you only smoked! We may have to do a lot of thinking, where we're bound to. Wonder what we'll find? Oh, that's right, leave it all to me, of course, and wash your paws of the whole blooming business!"

After a time he shook himself and knocked the red core from the pipe-bowl against his boot-heel. "I hate to start," he confessed, half to the dog and half to himself. "To leave anything so sheerly beautiful as this! However, on with the dance! By the road map the village can't be far now. So long, Mr. Bull!"

He clutched the self-starter. But there was only a protestant wheeze; the car declined to budge. Climbing down, he cranked vigorously. The motor turned over with a surly grunt of remonstrance and after a tentative *throb-throb,* coughed and stopped dead. Something was wrong. With a sigh he flung off his tweed jacket, donned a smudgy "jumper," opened his tool-box, and, with a glance at his wrist-watch which told him it was three o'clock, threw up the monster's hood and went bitterly to work.

At half past three the investigation had got as far as the lubricator. At four o'clock the bulldog had given it up and gone nosing afield. At half past four John Valiant lay flat on his back

like some disreputable stevadore, alternately tinkering with refractory valves and cursing the obdurate mechanism. Over his right eye an ooze of orange-colored oil glowered and glistened and indefatigably drip-dripped into his shrinking collar. A sharp stone gnawed frenziedly into the small of his back and just as he made a final vicious lunge, something gave way and a prickling red-hot stab of pain shot zigzagging from his smitten crazy-bone through every tortured crevice of his impatient frame. Like steel from flint it struck out a crisp oath that brought an answering bovine snort from the fence-corner.

Worming like a lizard to freedom, his eyes puckered shut with the wretched pang, John Valiant sat up and shook his grimy fist in the air. "You silly loafing idiot!" he cried. "Thump your own crazy-bone and see how you like it! You — oh, lord!"

His arm dropped, and a flush spread over his face to the brow. For his eyes had opened. He was gesturing not at the bull but at a girl, who fronted him beside the road, haughtiness in the very hue of her gray-blue linen walking suit and, in the clear-cut cameo face under her felt cavalry hat, myrtle-blue eyes that held a smolder of mingled astonishment and indignation. The long ragged stems of two crimson roses were thrust through her belt, a splash of blood-red against the pallid weave. An instant he gazed, all the muscles of his face tightened with chagrin.

"I — I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I didn't see you. I really didn't. I was — I was talking to the bull."

The girl had been glancing from the flushed face to the thistly fence-corner, while the startled dignity of her features warred with an unmistakable tendency to mirth. He could see the little rebellious twitch of the vivid lips, the tell-tale flutter of the eyelids, and the tremor of the gauntleted hand as it drew the hat firmly down over her curling masses of red-bronze. "What hair!" he was saying to himself. "It's red, but *what* a red! It has the burnish of hot copper! I never *saw* such hair!"

He had struggled to his feet, nursing his bruised elbow, irritably conscious of his resemblance to an emerging chimney-sweep. "I don't habitually swear," he said, "but I'd got to the point when something *had* to explode."

"Oh," she said, "don't mind me!" Then mirth conquered and she broke forth suddenly into a laugh that seemed to set the whole place aquiver with a musical contagion. They both laughed in concert, while the bull pawed the ground and sent forth a rumbling bellow of affront and challenge.

She was the first to recover. "You *did* look so funny!" she gasped.

"I can believe it," he agreed, making a vicious dab at his smudged brow. "The possibilities of a motor for comedy are simply stupendous."

She came closer and looked curiously at the quiescent monster — at the steamer-trunk strapped on the carrier and the bulging portmanteau peeping over the side of the tonneau. "Is it broken?"

"Merely on strike, I imagine. I think it resents the quality of the gasoline I got at Charlottesville. I can't decide whether it needs a monkey-wrench or a mustard-plaster. To tell the truth, it has been out of commission and I'm not much of an expert, though I can study it out in time. Are we far from the village?"

"About a mile and a half."

"I'll have to have it towed after me. The immediate point is my traps. I wonder if there is likely to be a team passing."

"I'm afraid it's not too certain," answered the girl, and now he noted the liquid modulation, with its slightly questioning accent, charmingly Southern. "There is no livery, but there is a negro who meets the train sometimes. I can send him if you like."

"You're very good," said Valiant, as she turned away, "and I'll be enormously obliged. Oh — and if you see a white dog, don't be frightened if he tries to follow you. He's perfectly kind."

She looked back momentarily.

"He — he always follows people he likes, you see —"

"Thank you," she said. The tone had now a

hint — small, yet perceptible — of aloofness. "I'm not in the least afraid of dogs." And with a little nod, she swung briskly on up the Red Road.

John Valiant stood staring after her till she had passed from view around a curve. "Oh, glory!" he muttered. "To begin by shaking your fist at her and end by making her wonder if you aren't trying to be fresh! You poor, profane, floundering dolt!"

After a time he discarded his "jumper" and contrived a make-shift toilet. "What a type!" he said to himself. "Corn-flower eyes and a blowse of coppery hair." A fragment of verse ran through his mind:

> "Tawny-flecked, russet-brown, in a tangle of gold,
> The billowy sweep of her flame-washed hair,
> Like amber lace, laid fold on fold,
> Or beaten metal beyond compare."

"Delicacy and strength!" he muttered, as he climbed again to the leather seat. "The steel blade in the silk scabbard. With that face in repose she might have been a maid of honor of the Stuarts' time! Yet when she laughed —"

The girl walked on up the highway with a lilting stride, now and then laughing to herself, or running a few steps, occasionally stopping by some hedge to pull a leaf which she rubbed against her

cheek, smelling its keen new scent, or stopping to gaze out across the orange-green belts of sunny wind-dimpled fields, one hand pushing back her mutinous hair from her brow, the other shielding her eyes. When she had passed beyond the ken of the stranded motor, she began to sing a snatch of a cabin song, her vivid red lips framing themselves about the absurd words with a humorous exaggeration of the soft darky pronunciation. Beneath its fun her voice held a haunting dreamy quality, as she sang, sometimes in the blaze of sun, sometimes with leaf-shadows above her through which the light spurted down in green-gilt splashes. Once she stopped suddenly, and crouching down by a thorn-hedge, whistled — a low mellow tentative pipe — and in a moment a brown-flecked covey of baby partridges rushed out of the grass to dart instantly back again. She laughed, and springing up, threw back her head and began a bird song, her slender throat pulsing to the shake and reedy trill. It was marvelously done, from the clear, long opening note to the soaring rapture that seemed to bubble and break all at once into its final crescendo.

Farther on the highroad looped around a strip of young forest, and she struck into this for a short cut. Here the trees stirred faintly in the breeze, filling the place with leafy rustlings and whisperings; yet it was so still that when a saffron-barred hornet darted through with an intolerant high-

keyed hum, it made the air for an instant angrily vocal, and a woodpecker's tattoo at some distance sounded with startling loudness, like a crackling series of pistol-shots.

In the depth of this wood she sat down to rest on the sun-splashed roots of a tree. Leaning back against the seamed trunk, her felt hat fallen to the ground, she looked like some sea-woman emerging from an earth-hued pool to comb her hair against a dappled rock. The ground was sparsely covered with gray-blue bushes whose fronds at a little distance blended into a haze till they seemed like billows of smoke suddenly solidified, and here and there a darting red or yellow flower gave the illusion of an under-tongue of flame. Her eyes, passionately eager, peered about her, drinking in each note of color as her quick ear caught each twig-fall, each sound of bird and insect.

She drew back against the tree and caught her breath as a bulldog frisked over a mossy boulder just in front of her.

A moment more and she had thrown herself on her knees with both arms outstretched. "Oh, you splendid creature!" she cried, "you big, lovely white darling!"

The dog seemed in no way averse to this sensational proceeding. He responded instantly not merely with tail-wagging, but with ecstatic grunts and growls. "Where did you come from?" she

questioned, as his pink tongue struggled desperately to find a cheek through the whorl of coppery hair. "Why, you must be the one I was told not to be afraid of."

She petted and fondled the smooth intelligent muzzle. "As if any one could be afraid of *you!* We'll set your master right on that point." Smiling to herself, she pulled one of the roses from her belt, and twisting a wisp of long grass, wound it round and round the dog's neck and thrust the ragged rose-stem firmly through it. "Now," she said, and pushed him gently from her, "go back, sir!"

He whined and licked her hand, but when she repeated the command, he turned obediently and left her. A little way from her he halted, with a sudden perception of mysterious punishment, shrugged, sat down, and tried to reach the irksome grass-wisp with his teeth. This failing, he rolled laboriously in the dirt.

Then he rose, cast a reproachful glance behind him, and trotted off.

CHAPTER VIII

MAD ANTHONY

BEYOND the selvage of the sleepy leaf-sheltered village a cherry bordered lane met the Red Road. On its one side was a clovered pasture and beyond this an orchard, bounded by a tall hedge of close-clipped box which separated it from a broad yard where the gray-weathered roof of Rosewood showed above a group of tulip and catalpa trees. Viewed nearer, the low stone house, with its huge overhanging eaves, would have looked like a small boy with his father's hat on but for the trellises of climbing roses that covered two sides and overflowed here and there on long arbors, flecking the dull brown stone with a glorious crimson, like a warrior's blood. On the sunny steps a lop-eared hound puppy was playing with a mottled cat.

The front door was open, showing a hall where stood a grandfather's clock and a spindle-legged table holding a bowl of potpourri. The timepiece had landed from a sailing vessel at Jamestown wharf with the household goods of that English Garland who had adopted the old Middle Planta-

tion when Dunmore was royal governor under George III. Framed portraits and engravings lent tints of tarnished silver, old-rose and sunset-golds — colors time-toned and reminiscent, carrying a charming sense of peaceful content, of gentleness and long tradition. The dark polished stairway had at its turn a square dormer-window which looked out upon one of the rose-arbors.

Down this stair, somewhat later that afternoon, came Shirley Dandridge, booted and spurred, the rebellious whorls of her russet hair now as closely filleted as a Greek boy's, in a short divided skirt of yew-green and a cool white blouse and swinging by its ribbon a green hat whose rolling brim was caught up at one side by a crisp blue-black hawk's feather. She stopped to peer out of the dormer-window to where, under the latticed weave of bloom, beside a round iron table holding a hoop of embroidery and a book or two, a lady sat reading.

The lady's hair was silver, but not with age. It had been so for many years, refuted by the transparent skin and a color as soft as the cheek of an apricot. It was solely in her dark eyes, deep and strangely luminous, that one might see lurking the somber spirit of passion and of pain. But they were eager and brilliant withal, giving the lie to the cane whose crook one pale delicate hand held with a clasp that somehow conveyed a sense of exasperate if semi-humorous rebellion. She wore

nun's gray; soft old lace was at her wrists and throat, and she was knitting a scarlet silk stocking.

She looked up at Shirley's voice, and smiled brightly. "Off for your ride, dear?"

"Yes. I'm going with the Chalmers."

"Oh, of course. Betty Page is visiting them, isn't she?"

Shirley nodded. "She came yesterday. I'll have to hurry, for I saw them from my window turning into the Red Road." She waved her hand and ran lightly down the stair and across the lawn to the orchard.

She pulled a green apple from a bough that hung over a stone wall and with this in her hand she came close to the pasture fence and whistled a peculiar call. It was answered by a low whinny and a soft thud of hoofs, and a golden-chestnut hunter thrust a long nose over the bars, flaring flame-lined nostrils to the touch of her hand. She laid her cheek against the white thoroughbred forehead and held the apple to the eager reaching lip, with several teasing withdrawings before she gave it to its juicy crunching.

"No, Selim," she said as the wide nostrils snuffled over her shoulder, the begging breath blowing warm against her neck. "No more — and no sugar to-day. Sugar has gone up two cents a pound."

She let down the top bar of the fence and vaulting over, ran to a stable and presently emerging with

a saddle on her arm, whistled the horse to her and saddled him. Then opening the gate, she mounted and cantered down the lane to meet the oncoming riders — a kindly-faced, middle-aged man, a younger one with dark features and coal-black hair, and two girls.

Chisholm Lusk spurred in advance and lifted his hat. "I held up the judge, Shirley," he said, "and made him bring me along. He tells me there's a fox-hunt on to-morrow; may I come?"

"Pshaw! Chilly," said the judge. "I don't believe you ever got up at five o'clock in your born days. You've learned bad habits abroad."

"You'll see," he answered. "If my man Friday doesn't rout me out to-morrow, I'll be up for murder."

They rode an hour, along stretches of sunny highways or on shaded bridle-paths where the horses' hoofs fell muffled in brown pine-needles and drooping branches flicked their faces. Then, by a murky way gouged with brusk gullies, across shelving fields and "turn-rows" in a long détour around Powhattan Mountain, a rough spur in the shape of an Indian's head that wedged itself forbiddingly between the fields of springing corn and tobacco. They approached the Red Road again by a crazy bridge whose adze-hewn flooring was held in place by wild grape-vines and weighted down against cloudburst and freshet by heavy boulders till it

dipped its middle like an overloaded buckboard in the yellow waters of the sluggish stream beneath. On the farther side they pulled down to breathe their horses. Here the road was like a narrow ruler dividing a desert from a promised land. On one hand a guttered slope of marl and pebbles covered with a tatterdemalion forest — on the other acre upon acre of burnished grain.

"Ah never saw such a frowsley-looking thing in mah life," said Betty Page, in her soft South Carolinian drawl that was all vowels and liquids, "as that wild hill beside those fields. For all the world like a disgraceful tramp leering across the wall at a dandy."

Shirley applauded the simile, and the judge said, "This is a boundary. That hobo-landscape is part of the deserted Valiant estate. The hill hides the house."

She nodded. "Damory Court. It's still vacant, Ah suppose."

"Yes, and likely to be. Valiant is dead long ago, but apparently there's never been any attempt to let it. I suppose his son is so rich that one estate more or less doesn't figure much to him."

"I got a letter this morning from Dorothy Randolph," said Shirley. "The Valiant Corporation is being investigated, you know, and her uncle had taken her to one of the hearings, when John Valiant was in the chair. From her description, they are

making it sufficiently hot for that silver-spooned young man."

"I don't reckon *he* cares," said Lusk satirically. "Nothing matters with his set if you have enough money."

The judge pointed with his crop. "That narrow wagon-track," he said, "goes to Hell's-Half-Acre."

"Oh, yes," said Betty. "That's that weird settlement on the Dome where Shirley's little protégée Rickey Snyder came from." It was all she said, but her glance at the girl beside her was one of open admiration. For, as all in the party knew, the lonely road had been connected with an act of sheer impulsive daring in Shirley's girlhood that she would never hear spoken of.

Judge Chalmers flicked his horse's ears gently with his rein and they moved slowly on, presently coming in sight of a humble patch of ground, enclosed in a worm-fence and holding a white-washed cabin with a well shaded by varicolored hollyhocks. Under the eaves clambered a gourd-vine, beneath which dangled strings of onions and bright red peppers. "Do let us get a drink!" said Chilly Lusk. "I'm as thirsty as a cotton-batting camel."

"All right, we'll stop," agreed the judge, "and you'll have a chance to see another local lion, Betty. This is where Mad Anthony lives. You must

have heard of him when you were here before. He's almost as celebrated as the Reverend John Jasper of Richmond."

Betty tapped her temple. "Where have Ah heard of John Jasper?"

"He was the author of the famous sermon on *The Sun do Move.* He used to prove it by a bucket of water that he set beside his pulpit Saturday night. As it hadn't spilled in the morning he knew it was the earth that stood still."

Betty nodded laughingly. "Ah remember now. He's the one who said there were only four great races: the Huguenots, the Hottentots, the Abyssinians and the Virginians. Is Mad Anthony really mad?"

"Only harmlessly," said Shirley. "He's stone blind. The negroes all believe he conjures — that's voodoo, you know. They put a lot of stock in his 'prophecisms.' He tells fortunes, too. S-sh!" she warned. "He's sitting on the door-step. He's heard us."

The old negro had the torso of a black patriarch. He sat bolt upright with long straight arms resting on his knees, and his face had that peculiar expressionless immobility seen in Egyptian carvings. He had slightly turned his head in their direction, his brow, under its shock of perfectly white crinkly hair, twitching with a peculiar expression of inquiry. His age might have been anything

judging from his face which was so seamed and creviced with innumerable tiny wrinkles that it most resembled the tortured glaze of some ancient bitumen pottery unearthed from a tomb of Kôr. Under their heavy lids his sightless eyeballs, whitely opaque and lusterless, turned mutely toward the sound of the horse hoofs.

The judge dismounted, and tossing his bridle over a fence-picket, took from his pocket a collapsible drinking cup. "Howdy do, Anthony," he said. "We just stopped for a drink of your good water."

The old negro nodded his head. "Good watah," he said in the gentle quavering tones of extreme age. "Yas, Mars'. He'p yo'se'f. Come f'om de centah ob de yerf, dat watah. En dah's folks say de centah of de yerf is all fiah. Yo' reck'n dey's right, Mars' Chahmahs?"

"Now, how the devil do you know who I am, Anthony?" The judge set down his cup on the well-curb. "I haven't been by here for a year."

The ebony head moved slowly from side to side. "Ol' Ant'ny don' need no eyes," he said, touching his hand to his brow. "He see ev'ything heah."

The judge beckoned to the others and they trooped inside the paling. "I've brought some other folks with me, Anthony; can you tell who they are?"

The sightless look wavered over them and the

white head shook slowly. "Don' know young mars,'," said the gentle voice. "How many yuddahs wid yo'? One, two? No, don' know young mistis, eidah."

"I reckon you *don't* need any eyes," Judge Chalmers laughed, as he passed the sweet cold water to the rest. "One of these young ladies wants you to tell her fortune."

The old negro dropped his head, waving his gaunt hands restlessly. Then his gaze lifted and the whitened eyeballs roved painfully about as if in search of something elusive. The judge beckoned to Betty Page, but she shook her head with a little grimace and drew back.

"You go, Shirley," she whispered, and with a laughing glance at the others, Shirley came and sat down on the lowest step.

Mad Anthony put out a wavering hand and touched the young body. His fingers strayed over the habit and went up to the curling bronze under the hat-brim. "Dis de li'l mistis," he muttered, "ain' afeahd ob ol' Ant'ny. Dah's fiah en she ain' afeahd, en dah's watah en she ain' afeahd. Wondah whut Ah gwine tell huh? Whut de coloh ob yo' haih, honey?"

"Black," put in Chilly Lusk, with a wink at the others. "Black as a crow."

Old Anthony's hand fell back to his knee. "Young mars' laugh at de ol' man," he said, "but

he don' know. Dat de coloh dat buhn mah han's — de coloh ob gol', en eyes blue like er cat-bird's aig. Dah's er man gwine look in dem eyes, honey, en gwine make 'em cry en cry." He raised his head sharply, his lids shut tight, and swung his arm toward the North. "Dah's whah he come f'om," he said, "en heah"— his arm veered and he pointed straight toward the ragged hill behind them —"he stay."

Lusk laughed noiselessly. "He's pointing to Damory Court," he whispered to Nancy Chalmers, "the only uninhabited place within ten miles. That's as near as he often hits it, I fancy."

"Heah's whah he stay," repeated the old man. "Heap ob trouble wait heah fo' him too, honey,— heap ob trouble, heah whah li'l mistis fin' him." His voice dropped to a monotone, and he began to rock gently to and fro as if he were crooning a lullaby. "Li'l trouble en gr'et trouble! Fo' dah's fiah en she ain' afeahd, en dah's watah en she ain' afeahd. It's de thing whut eat de ha'at outen de breas'— dat whut she afeahd of!"

"Come, Anthony," said Judge Chalmers, laying his hand on the old man's shoulder. "That's much too mournful! Give her something nice to top off with, at least!"

But Anthony paid no heed, continuing his rocking and his muttering. "Gr'et trouble. Dah's fiah en she ain' afeahd, en dah's watah en she ain'

afeahd. En Ah sees yo' gwine ter him, honey. Ah heah's de co'ot-house clock a-strikin' in de night — en yo' gwine. Don' wait, don' wait, li'l mistis, er de trouble-cloud gwine kyah him erway f'om yo'. . . . When de clock strike thuhteen — when de clock strike thuhteen —"

The droning voice ceased. The gaunt form became rigid. Then he started and turned his eyes slowly about him, a vague look of anxiety on his face. For a moment no one moved. When he spoke again it was once more in his gentle quavering voice:

"Watah? Yas, Mars', good watah. He'p yo'-se'f."

The judge set a dollar bill on the step and weighted it with a stone, as the rest remounted. "Well, good-by, Anthony," he said. "We're mightily obliged."

He sprang into the saddle and the quartette cantered away. "My experiment wasn't a great success, I'm afraid, Shirley," he said ruefully.

"Oh, I think it was splendid!" cried Nancy. "Do you suppose he really believes those spooky things? I declare, at the time I almost did myself. What an odd idea — 'when the clock strikes thirteen,' which, of course, it never does."

"Don't mind, Shirley," bantered Lusk. "When you see all 'dem troubles' coming, sound the alarm and we'll fly in a body to your rescue."

They let their horses out for a pounding gallop which pulled down suddenly at a muffled shriek from Betty Page, as her horse went into the air at sight of an automobile by the roadside.

"Now, whose under the canopy is that?" exclaimed Lusk.

"It's stalled," said Shirley. "I passed here this afternoon when the owner was trying to start it, and I sent Unc' Jefferson as first aid to the injured."

"I wonder who he can be," said Nancy. "I've never seen that car before."

"Why," said Betty gaily, "*Ah* know! It's Mad Anthony's trouble-man, of course, come for Shirley."

CHAPTER IX

UNCLE JEFFERSON

A RED rose, while ever a thing of beauty, is not invariably a joy forever. The white bulldog, as he plodded along the sunny highway, was sunk in depression. Being trammeled by the limitations of a canine horizon, he could not understand the whims of Adorable Ones met by the way, who seemed so glad to see him that they threw both arms about him, and then tied to his neck irksome colored weeds that prickled and scratched and would not be dislodged. Lacking a basis of painful comparison, since he had never had a tin can tied to his tail, he accepted it as condign punishment and was puzzledly wretched. So it was a chastened and shamed Chum who at length wriggled stealthily into the seat of the stranded automobile beside his master and thrust a dirty pink nose into his palm.

John Valiant lifted his hand to stroke the shapely head, then drew it back with an exclamation. A thorn had pricked his thumb. He looked down and saw the draggled flower thrust through the twist

of grass. "Oh, pup of wonders!" he exclaimed. "Where did you get that rose?"

Chum sat up and wagged his tail, for his master's tone, instead of ridicule, held a dawning delight. Perhaps the thing had not been intended as a disgrace after all! As the careful hand drew the misused blossom tenderly from its tether, he barked joyously with recovered spirits.

With the first sight of the decoration Valiant had had a sudden memory of a splotch of vivid red against the belted gray-blue of a gown. He grinned appreciatively. "And I *warned* her," he chuckled. "Told her not to be afraid!" He dusted the blossom painstakingly with his handkerchief and held it to his face — a live brilliant thing, breathing musk-odors of the mid-moon of paradise.

A long time he sat, while the dog dozed and yawned on the shiny cushion beside him. Gradually the clover-breeze fainted and the lengthening shadows dipped their fingers into indigo. On the far amethystine peaks of the Blue Ridge leaned milky-breasted clouds through which the sun sifted in wide bars. A blackbird began to flute from some near-by tree and across the low stone wall he heard a feathery whir. Of a sudden Chum sat up and barked in earnest.

Turning his head, his master saw approaching a dilapidated hack with side-lanterns like great goggles and decrepit and palsied curtains. It was

drawn by a lean mustard-tinted mule, and on its front seat sat a colored man of uncertain age, whose hunched vertebræ and outward-crooked arms gave him a curious expression of replete and bulbous inquiry. Abreast of the car he removed a moth-eaten cap.

"Evenin', suh," he said,—"evenin', evenin'."

"Howdy do," returned the other amiably.

"Ah reck'n yo'-all done had er breck-down wid dat machine-thing dar. Spec' er graveyahd rabbit done cross yo' pahf. Yo' been hyuh 'bout er hour, ain' yo'?"

"Nearer three," said Valiant cheerfully, "but the view's worth it."

A hoarse titter came from the conveyance, which gave forth sundry creakings of leather. "Huyh! Huyh! Dat's so, suh. Dat's so! Hm-m. Reck'n Ah'll be gittin' erlong back." He clucked to the mule and proceeded to turn the vehicle round.

"Hold on," cried John Valiant. "I thought you were bound in the other direction."

"No, *suh.* Ah'm gwine back whah I come f'om. Ah jus' druv out hyuh 'case Miss Shirley done met me, en she say, 'Unc' Jeffe'son, yo' go 'treckly out de Red Road, 'case er gemman done got stalled-ed.'"

"Oh — Miss Shirley. She told you, did she? What did you say her first name was?"

"*Dat's* huh fust name, Miss Shirley. Yas, *suh!*

Miss Shirley done said f' me ter come en git de gemman whut — whut kinder dawg is yo' got dar?"

"It's a bulldog. Can you give me a lift? I've got that small trunk and —"

"Dat's a right fine dawg. Miss Shirley she moghty fond ob dawgs, too."

"Fond of dogs, is she?" said Valiant. "I might have known it. It was nice of her to send you here, Uncle Jefferson. You can take me and my traps, I suppose?"

"'Pens on whah yo' gwineter," answered Uncle Jefferson sapiently.

"I'm going to Damory Court."

A kind of shocked surprise that was almost stupefaction spread over the other's face, like oil over a pool. "Dam'ry Co'ot! Dat's de old Valiant place. Ain' nobody lives *dar*. Ah reck'n ain' nobody live dar fer mos' er hun'erd yeahs!"

"The old house has a great surprise coming to it," said Valiant gravely. "Henceforth some one is going to occupy it. How far is it away?"

"Measurin' by de coonskin en th'owin' in de tail, et's erbout two mile. Ain' gwineter live dar yo'se'f, suh, is yo'?"

"I am for the present," was the crisp answer.

Uncle Jefferson stared at him a moment with his mouth open. Then ejaculating under his breath, "Fo' de *Lawd!* Whut folks gwineter say ter dat!"

he shambled to the rear of the motor and began to unship the steamer-trunk.

"By the way,"— John Valiant paused, with the portmanteau in his hands,—"what do you ask for the job?"

The owner of the hack scratched his grizzled head. "Ah gen'ly chahges er quahtah er trunk f'um de deepo' les'n et's one ob dem ar rich folks f'om up Norf."

"I don't happen to be rich, so we'll make it a dollar. What makes you think I'm from the North?"

Again the aguish mirth agitated the other, as he put aboard a hamper and one of the motor's lamps, which Valiant added as an afterthought. "Ah *knows* et," he said ingenuously, "but Ah don' know *why*. Ah'll jes' twis' er rope eroun' yo' trunk. Whut yo' gwineter do wid dat-ar?" he asked, pointing to the car. "Ah kin come wid ole Sukey — dat's mah mule — en fotch it in in de mawnin'. Ain' gwineter rain ter-night nohow."—

This matter having been arranged, they started jogging down the green-bordered road, the bulldog prospecting alongside. A meadow-lark soared somewhere in the overarching blue, dropping golden notes; dusty bumble-bees boomed hither and thither; genial crickets tuned their fiddles in the "tickle-grass" and a hawking dragon-fly paused

for an impudent siesta between the mule's gyrating ears.

"S'pose'n de Co'ot done ben sold en yo' gwineter fix it up fo' de new ownah," hazarded Uncle Jefferson presently.

Valiant did not answer directly. "You say the place hasn't been occupied for many years," he observed. "Did you ever hear why, Uncle Jefferson?"

"Ah done *heerd,*" said the other vaguely, "but Ah disremembahs. Sump'in dat happened befo'. Ah come heah f'om ol' Post-Oak Plantation. Reck'n Majah Bristow *he* know erbout it, er Mis' Judith — dat's Miss Shirley's mothah. Her fathah wus Gen'l Tawm Dandridge, en he died fo' she wus bawn."

Shirley Dandridge! A high-sounding name, with something of long-linked culture, of arrogant heritage. In some subtle way it seemed to clothe the personality of which Valiant had had that fleeting roadside glimpse.

Uncle Jefferson stared meditatively skyward whence dropped the bubbling lark song. "Dat-ar buhd kin *sing!*" he said. "Queeh dat folkses cyan' do dat, dey so moughty much smahtah. Nevah knowed nobody *could,* dough, cep'n on'y Miss Shirley. Tain' er buhd nowhah in de fiel's dat she cyan' mock."

"You mean she knows their calls?"

"Yas, suh, ev'y soun'. Done fool me heap er times. Dah's de cook's li'l boy et Rosewood dat wuz sick las' summah, en he listen ev'y day ter de mockin'-buhd dat nes' in one ob de tulip-trees. He jes' love dat buhd next ter he mammy, en when et come fall en et don' come no mo', he ha'at mos' broke. He jes' lay en cry en git right smaht wussur. Et las' seems lak de li'l boy gwine die. When Mis' Shirley heah dat, she try en try till she jes' git dat buhd's song ez pat ez de Lawd's Prayah, en one evenin' she gwine en say ter he mammy ter tell him he mockin'-buhd done come back, en he mammy she bundle him all up in de quilt en open de winder, en sho' nuff, dah's Mistah Mockin'-buhd behin' de bushes, jes' bus'in' hisse'f. Well, suh, seems lak dat chile hang on ter living jes' ter heah dat buhd, en ev'y evenin', way till when de snow on de groun', Mis' Shirley she hide out in de trees en sing en sing till de po' li'l feller gwine ter sleep."

Valiant leaned forward, for Uncle Jefferson had paused. "Did the child get well?" he asked eagerly.

The old man clucked to the leisurely mule. "Yas, *suh!*" he said. "He done git well. He 'bout de on'riest young'un roun' heah now!

"Reck'n yo'-all come f'om New York?" inquired Uncle Jefferson, after a little silence. "So! Dey say dat's er pow'ful big place. But Ah reck'n ol'

Richmon's big ernuf fo' me." He clucked to the leisurely mule and added, "*Ah* bin ter Richmon' onct. Yas, *suh!* Ah nevah see sech houses — mos' all bigger'n de county co'ot-house."

John Valiant expressed a somewhat absent interest. He was looking thoughtfully at the blossom in his hand, in an absorption through which Uncle Jefferson's reminiscences oozed on:

"Mos' cur'ousest thing wus how e'vybody dar seem ter know e'vybody else. Dey got street-kyahs dar, no hoss en no mule, jes' shoot up de hill en down ergen, lak de debble skinnin' tan-bahk. Well, suh, Ah got on er kyah en gib de man whut stan' on de flatfawm er nickel, en Ah set dar lookin' outen de win'ow, till de man he call out 'Adams,' en er gemman whut wah sittin' ercross f'om me, he git up en git off. De kyah start ergen en de nex co'nah dat ar man on de flatfawm he yell out 'Monroe.' En Mistah Monroe, he was sittin' up at de end, en he jump up en git off. Den de kyah took anuddah staht, en bress mah soul, dat ar man on de flatfawm he hollah 'Jeffe'son!' Ah clah' ter goodness, suh, Ah nebbah skeered so bad en mah life. How dat man know me, suh? Well, suh, Ah jump up lak Ah be'n shot, en Ah says, 'Fo' de *lawd,* boss, Ah wa'n't gwineter git off at dis co'-nah, but ef yo' *says* so, Ah reck'n Ah *got* ter!' So Ah git off en Ah walk erbout fo' miles back ter de deepo!"

Uncle Jefferson's inward and volcanic amusement shook his passenger from his reverie. "En dat ar wa'n't de wust. When Ah got ter de deepo, Ah didn' have mah pocketbook. Er burglar had 'scaped off wid it en lef' me es nickelless ez er convic'."

CHAPTER X

WHAT HAPPENED THIRTY YEARS AGO

WHEN Shirley came across the lawn at Rosewood, Major Montague Bristow sat under the arbor talking to her mother.

The major was massive-framed, with a strong jaw and a rubicund complexion — the sort that might be supposed to have attained the utmost benefit to be conferred by a consistent indulgence in mint-juleps. His blue eyes were piercing and arched with brows like sable rainbows, at variance with his heavy iron-gray hair and imperial. His head was leonine and he looked like a king who has humbled his enemy. It may be added that his linen was fine and immaculate, his black string-tie precisely tied and a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses swung by a flat black cord against his white waistcoat. There was a touch of the military in the squareness of shoulder and the lift of the rugged head, no less than in the gallant little bow with which he rose to greet the girl coming toward them.

"Shirley," said her mother, "the major's brutal, and he shan't have his mint-julep."

"What has he been doing?" asked the other, her brows wrinkling in a delightful way she had.

"He has reminded me that I'm growing old."

Shirley looked at the major skeptically, for his chivalry was undoubted. During a long career in law and legislature it had been said of him that he could neither speak on the tariff question nor defend a man for murder, without first paying a tribute to "the women of the South, sah."

"Nothing of the sort," he rumbled.

Mrs. Dandridge's face softened to wistfulness. "Shirley, *am* I?" she asked, with a quizzical, almost a droll uneasiness. "Why, I've got every emotion I've ever had. I read all the new French novels, and I'm even thinking of going in for the militant suffragette movement."

The girl had tossed her hat and crop on the table and seated herself by her mother's chair. Now reaching down, she drew one of the fragile blue-veined hands up against her cheek, her bronze hair, its heavy coil loosened, dropping over one shoulder like sunlit seaweed. "What was it he said, dearest?"

"He thinks I ought to wear a worsted shawl and arctics." Her mother thrust out one little thin-slippered foot, with its slender ankle gleaming through its open-work stocking like mother-of-pearl. "Imagine! In *May*. And he knows I'm vain of my feet! Major, if you had ever had a

wife, you would have learned wisdom. But you mean well, and I'll take back what I said about the julep. You mix it, Shirley. Yours is even better than Ranston's."

"She makes me one every day, Monty," she continued, as Shirley went into the house. "And when she isn't looking, I pour it into the bush there. See those huge, maudlin-looking roses? That's the shameless result. It's a new species. I'm going to name it *Tipsium Giganticum.*"

Major Bristow laughed as he bit the end off a cigar. "All the same," he said in his big rumbling voice, "you need 'em, I reckon. You need more than mint-juleps, too. You leave the whisky to me and the doctor, and you take Shirley and pull out for Italy. Why not? A year there would do you a heap of good."

She shook her head. "No, Monty. It isn't what you think. It's — here." She lifted her hand and touched her heart. "It's been so for a long time. But it may — it can't go on forever, you see. Nothing can."

The major had leaned forward in his chair. "Judith!" he said, and his hand twitched, "it isn't true!" And then, "How do you know?"

She smiled at him. "You remember when that big surgeon from Vienna came to see the doctor last year? Well, the doctor brought him to me. I'd known it before in a way, but it had gone far-

ther than I thought. No one can tell just how long it may be. It may be years, of course, but I'm not taking any sea trips, Monty."

He cleared his throat and his voice was husky when he spoke. "Shirley doesn't know?"

"Certainly *not*. She mustn't." And then, in sudden sharpness: "You shan't tell her, Monty. You wouldn't dare!"

"No, indeed," he assured her quickly. "Of course not."

"It's just among us three, Doctor Southall and you and me. We three have had our secrets before, eh, Monty?"

"Yes, Judith, we have."

She bent toward him, her hands tightening on the cane. "After all, it's true. To-day I *am* getting old. I may look only fifty, but I feel sixty and I'll admit to seventy-five. It's joy that keeps us young, and I didn't get my fair share of that, Monty. For just one little week my heart had it all — *all* — and then — well, then it was finished. It was finished long before I married Tom Dandridge. It isn't that I'm empty-headed. It's that I've been an empty-*hearted* woman, Monty — as empty and dusty and desolate as the old house over yonder on the ridge."

"I know, Judith, I know."

"You've been empty in a way, too," she said. "But it's been a different way. You were never

in love — really in love, I mean. Certainly not with me, Monty, though you tried to make me think so once upon a time, before Sassoon came along, and — Beauty Valiant."

The major blinked, suddenly startled. It was out, the one name neither had spoken to the other for thirty years! He looked at her a little guiltily; but her eyes had turned away. They were gazing between the catalpas to where, far off on a gentle rise, the stained gable of a roof thrust up dark and gaunt above its nest of foliage. "Everything changed then," she continued dreamily, "everything."

The major's fingers strayed across his waistcoat, fumbling uncertainly for his eye-glasses. For an instant he, too, was back in the long-ago past, when he and Valiant had been comrades. What a long panorama unfolded at the name; the times when they had been boys fly-fishing in the Rapidan and fox-hunting about Pilot-Knob with the yelping hounds — crisp winters of books and pipes together at the old university at Charlottesville — later maturer years about Damory Court when the trail of sex had deepened into man's passion and the devil's rivalry. It had been a curious three-sided affair — he, and Valiant, and Sassoon. Sassoon with his dissipated flair and ungovernable temper and strange fits of recklessness; clean, high-idealed, straight-away Valiant; and he — a Bristow, neither

better nor worse than the rest of his name. He remembered that mad strained season when he had grimly recognized his own cause as hopeless, and with burning eyes had watched Sassoon and Valiant racing abreast. He remembered that glittering prodigal dance when he had come upon Valiant and Judith standing in the shrubbery, the candle-light from some open door engoldening their faces: hers smiling, a little flippant perhaps, and conscious of her spell; his grave and earnest, yet wistful.

"You promise, John?"

"I give my sacred word. Whatever the provocation, I will not lift my hand against him. Never, never!" Then the same voice, vibrant, appealing. "Judith! It isn't because — because — you care for him?"

He had plunged away in the darkness before her answer came. What had it mattered then to him what she had replied? And that very night had befallen the fatal quarrel!

The major started. How that name had blown away the dust! "That's a long time ago, Judith."

"Think of it! I wore my hair just as Shirley does now. It was the same color, with the same fascinating little lights and whorls in it." She turned toward him, but he sat rigidly upright, his gaze avoiding hers. Her dreamy look was gone now, and her eyes were very bright.

"Thirty years ago to-morrow they fought," she said softly, "Valiant and Sassoon. Every woman has her one anniversary, I suppose, and to-morrow's mine. Do you know what I do, every fourteenth of May, Monty? I keep my room and spend the day always the same way. There's a little book I read. And there's an old haircloth trunk that I've had since I was a girl. Down in the bottom of it are some — things, that I take out and set round the room . . . and there is a handful of old letters I go over from first to last. They're almost worn out now, but I could repeat them all with my eyes shut. Then, there's a tiny old straw basket with a yellow wisp in it that once was a bunch of cape jessamines. I wore them to that last ball — the night before it happened. The fourteenth of May used to be sad, but now, do you know, I look forward to it! I always have a lot of jessamines that particular day — I'll have Shirley get me some to-morrow — and in the evening, when I go downstairs, the house is full of the scent of them. All summer long it's roses, but on the fourteenth of May it has to be jessamines. Shirley must think me a whimsical old woman, but I insist on being humored."

She was silent a moment, the point of her slender cane tracing circles in the gravel. "It's a black date for you too, Monty. *I* know. But men and

women are different. I wonder what takes the place to a man of a woman's haircloth trunk?"

"I reckon it's a demijohn," he said mirthlessly.

A smile flashed over her face, like sunshine over a flower, and she looked up at him slowly. "What bricks men are to each other! You and the doctor were John Valiant's closest friends. What did you two care what people said? Why, *women* don't stick to each other like that! It isn't in petticoats! It wouldn't do for women to take to dueling, Monty; when the affair was over and done, the seconds would fall to with their hatpins and jab each other's eyes out!"

He smiled, a little bleakly, and cleared his throat.

"Isn't it strange for me to be talking this way now!" she said presently. "Another proof that I'm getting old. But the date brings it very close; it seems, somehow, closer than ever this year.—Monty, weren't you tremendously surprised when I married Tom Dandridge?"

"I certainly was."

"I'll tell you a secret. *I* was, too. I suppose I did it because of a sneaking feeling that some people were feeling sorry for me, which I never could stand. Well, he was a man any one might honor. I've always thought a woman ought to have two husbands: one to love and cherish, and the other to honor and obey. I had the latter, at any rate."

"And you've lived, Judith," he said.

"Yes," she agreed, with a little sigh, "I've lived. I've had Shirley, and she's twenty and adorable. Some of my emotions creak a bit in the hinges, but I've enjoyed things. A woman is cat enough not to be wholly miserable if she can sit in the sun and purr. And I've had people enough, and books to read, and plenty of pretty things to look at, and old lace to wear, and I've kept my figure and my vanity — I'm not too old yet to thank the Lord for that! So don't talk to me about worsted shawls and horrible arctics. For I won't wear 'em. Not if I know myself! Here comes Shirley. She's made two juleps, and if you're a gentleman, you'll distract her attention till I've got rid of mine in my usual way."

The major, at the foot of the cherry-bordered lane, looked back across the box-hedge to where the two figures sat under the rose-arbor, the mother's face turned lovingly down to Shirley's at her knee. He stood a moment watching them from under his slouched hat-brim.

"You never looked at me that way, Judith, did you!" he sighed to himself. "It's been a long time, too, since I began to want you to —'most forty years. When it came to the show-down, I wasn't even as fit as Tom Dandridge!"

He pulled his hat down farther over his big brow

and sighed again as he strode on. "You just couldn't make yourself care, could you! People can't, maybe. And I reckon you were right about it. I wasn't fit."

CHAPTER XI

DAMORY COURT

"DAR'S Dam'ry Co'ot smack-dab ahaid, suh." John Valiant looked up. Facing them at an elbow of the broad road, was an old gateway of time-nicked stone, clasping an iron gate that was quaint and heavy and red with rust. Over it on either side twin sugar-trees flung their untrammeled strength, and from it, leading up a gentle declivity, ran a curving avenue of oaks. He put out his hand.

"Wait a moment," he said in a low voice, and as the creaking conveyance stopped, he turned and looked about him.

Facing the entrance the land fell away sharply to a miniature valley through which rambled a willow-bordered brook, in whose shallows short-horned cows stood lazily. Beyond, alternating with fields of young grain and verdured pastures like crushed velvet, rose a succession of tranquil slopes crowned with trees that here and there grouped about a white colonial dwelling, with its outbuildings behind it. Beyond, whither wound the Red Road, he could see a drowsy village, with a spire and a cupolaed

court-house; and farther yet a yellow gorge with a wisp of white smoke curling above it marked the course of a crawling far-away railway. Over all the dimming yellow sunshine, and girdling the farther horizon, in masses of purplish blue, the tumbled battlements of the Blue Ridge.

His conductor had laboriously descended and now the complaining gates swung open. Before them, as they toiled up the long ascent, the neglected driveway was a riot of turbulent growth: thistle, white-belled burdock, ragweed and dusty mullein stood waist high.

"Et's er moughty fine ol' place, suh, wid dat big revenue ob trees," said Uncle Jefferson. "But Ah reck'n et ain' got none ob de modern connivances."

But Valiant did not answer; his gaze was straight before him, fixed on the noble old house they were approaching. Its wide and columned front peered between huge rugged oaks and slender silver poplars which cast cool long shadows across an unkempt lawn laden with ragged mock-orange, lilac and syringa bushes, its stately grandeur dimmed but not destroyed by the shameful stains of the neglected years.

As he jumped down he was possessed by an odd sensation of old acquaintance — as if he had seen those tall white columns before — an illusory half-vision into some shadowy, fourth-dimensional landscape that belonged to his subconscious self, or

that, glimpsed in some immaterial dream-picture, had left a faint-etched memory. Then, on a sudden, the vista vibrated and widened, the white columns expanded and shot up into the clouds, and from every bush seemed to peer a friendly black savage with woolly white hair!

"Wishing-House!" he whispered. He looked about him, half expecting — so vivid was the illusion — to see a circle of rough huts under the trees and a multitude of ebony imps dancing in the sunshine. So Virginia had been that secret Never-Never Land, the wondrous fairy demesne of his childhood, with its amiable barbarians and its thickets of coursing grimalkins! The hidden country which his father's thoughts, sadly recurring, had painted to the little child that once he was, in the guise of an endless wonder-tale! His eyes misted over, and it seemed to him that moment that his father was very near.

Leaving the negro to unload his belongings, he traversed an overgrown path of mossed gravel, between box-rows frowsled like the manes of lions gone mad and smothered in an accumulation of matted roots and débris of rotting foliage, and presently, the bulldog at his heels, found himself in the rear of the house.

The building, with kitchen, stables and negro quarters behind it, had been set on the boss of

the wooded knoll. Along half its side ran a wide porch that had once been glass-enclosed, now with panes gone and broken and putty-crumbling sashes. Below it lay the piteous remnants of a formal garden, grouped about an oval pool from whose center reared the slender yellowed shaft of a fountain in whose shallow cup a robin was taking its rain-water bath. The pool was dry, the tiles that had formed its floor were prized apart with weeds; ribald wild grape-vines ran amuck hither and thither; and over all was a drenching-sweet scent of trailing honeysuckle.

Threading his way among the dank undergrowth of the desolate wilderness, following the sound of running water, he came suddenly to a little lake fed from unseen pipes, that spread its lily-padded surface coolly and invitingly under a clump of elms. Beside it stood a spring-house with a sadly sagging roof. With a dead branch he probed the water's depth. "Ten feet and a pebble bottom," he said. The lake's overflow poured in a musical cascade down between fern-covered rocks, to join, far below, the stream he had seen from the gateway. Beyond this the ground rose again to a hill, densely forested and flanked by runnelled slopes of poverty-stricken broom-sedge as stark and sear as the bad-lands of an alkali desert. As he gazed, a bird bubbled into a wild song from the grape-

vine tangle behind him, and almost at his feet a rabbit scudded blithely out of the weeds and darted back.

"Mine!" he said aloud with a rueful pride. "And for general run-downness, it's up to the advertisement." He looked musingly at the piteous wreck and ruin, his gaze sweeping down across the bared fields and unkempt forest. "Mine!" he repeated. "All that, I suppose, for it has the same earmarks of neglect. Between those cultivated stretches it looks like a wedge of Sahara gone astray." His gaze returned to the house. "Yet what a place it must have been in its time!" It had not sprung into being at the whim of any one man; it had grown mellowly and deliberately, expressing the multiform life and culture of a stock. Generation after generation, father and son, had lived there and loved it, and, ministering to all, it had given to each of itself. The wild weird beauty was infecting him and the pathos of the desolation caught at his heart. He went slowly back to where his conductor sat on the lichened horse-block.

"We's heah," called Uncle Jefferson cheerfully. "Whut we gwineter do nex', suh? Reck'n Ah bettah go ovah ter Miss Dandridge's place fer er crowbah. Lawd!" he added, "ef he ain' got de key! Whut yo' think ob dat now?"

John Valiant was looking closely at the big key; for there were words, which he had not noted be-

fore, engraved in the massive flange: *Friends all hours.* He smiled. The sentiment sent a warm current of pleasure to his finger-tips. Here was the very text of hospitality!

A Lilliputian spider-web was stretched over the preempted keyhole, and he fetched a grass-stem and poked out its tiny gray-striped denizen before he inserted the key in the rusted lock. He turned it with a curious sense of timidity. All the strength of his fingers was necessary before the massive door swung open and the leveling sun sent its late red rays into the gloomy interior.

He stood in a spacious hall, his nostrils filled with a curious but not unpleasant aromatic odor with which the place was strongly impregnated. The hall ran the full length of the building, and in its center a wide, balustraded double staircase led to upper darkness. The floor, where his footprints had disturbed the even gray film of dust, was of fine close parquetry and had been generously strewn everywhere with a mica-like powder. He stooped and took up a pinch in his fingers, noting that it gave forth the curious spicy scent. Dim paintings in tarnished frames hung on the walls. From a niche on the break of the stairway looked down the round face of a tall Dutch clock, and on one side protruded a huge bulging something draped with a yellowed linen sheet. From its shape he guessed this to be an elk's head. Dust, undis-

turbed, lay thickly on everything, ghostly floating cobwebs crawled across his face, and a bat flitted out of a fireplace and vanished squeaking over his head. With Uncle Jefferson's help he opened the rear doors and windows, knocked up the rusted belts of the shutters and flung them wide.

But for the dust and cobwebs and the strange odor, mingled with the faint musty smell that pervades a sunless interior, the former owner of the house might have deserted it a week ago. On a wall-rack lay two walking-sticks and a gold-mounted hunting-crop, and on a great carved chest below it had been flung an opened book bound in tooled leather. John Valiant picked this up curiously. It was *Lucile*. He noted that here and there passages were marked with penciled lines — some light and femininely delicate, some heavier, as though two had been reading it together, noting their individual preferences.

He laid it back musingly, and opening a door, entered the large room it disclosed. This had been the dining-room. The walls were white, in alternate panels with small oval mirrors whose dust-covered surfaces looked like ground steel. At one end stood a crystal-knobbed mahogany sideboard, holding glass candlesticks in the shape of Ionic columns — above it a quaint portrait of a lady in hoops and love-curls — and at the other end was a

huge fireplace with rust-red fire-dogs and tarnished brass fender. All these, with the round centipede table and the Chippendale chairs set in order against the walls, were dimmed and grayed with a thick powdering of dust.

The next room that he entered was big and wide, a place of dark colors, nobly smutched of time. It had been at once library and living-room. Glass-faced book-shelves ran along one side — well-stocked, as the dusty panes showed — and a huge pigeonholed desk glowered in the big bow-window that opened on to what had been the garden. On the wall hung an old map of Virginia. At one side the dark wainscoting yawned to a cavernous fireplace and inglenook with seats in black leather. By it stood a great square tapestry screen, showing a hunting scene, set in a heavy frame. A great leather settee was drawn near the desk and beside this stood a reading-stand with a small china dog and a squat bronze lamp upon it. In contrast to the orderly dining-room there was about this chamber a sense of untouched disorder — a desk-drawer jerked half-open, a yellowed newspaper torn across and flung into a corner, books tossed on desk and lounge, and in the fireplace a little heap of whitened ashes in which charred fragments told of letters and papers burned in haste. A bottle that had once held brandy and a grimy goblet stood

on the desk, and in a metal ash-tray on the reading-stand lay a half-smoked cigar that crumbled to dust in the intruder's fingers.

One by one Valiant forced open the tall French windows, till the fading light lay softly over the austere dignity of the apartment. In that somber room, he knew, had had place whatever was most worthy in the lives of his forebears. The thought of generation upon generation had steeped it in human association.

Suddenly he lifted his eyes. Above the desk hung a life-size portrait of a man, in the high soft stock and velvet collar of half a century before. The right eye, strangely, had been cut from the canvas. He stood straight and tall, one hand holding an eager hound in leash, his face proud and florid, his single, cold, steel-blue eye staring down through its dusty curtain with a certain malicious arrogance, and his lips set in a sardonic curve that seemed about to sneer. It was for an instant as if the pictured figure confronted the young man who stood there, mutely challenging his entrance into that tomb-like and secret-keeping quiet; and he gazed back as fixedly, repelled by the craft of the face, yet subtly attracted. "I wonder who you were," he said. "You were cruel. Perhaps you were wicked. But you were strong, too."

He returned to the outer hall to find that the ne-

gro had carried in his trunk, and he bade him place it, with the portmanteau, in the room he had just left. Dusk was falling. The air was full of a faint far chirr of night insects, like an elfin serenade, and here and there among the trees pulsed the greenish-yellow spark of a firefly.

"Uncle Jefferson," said Valiant abruptly, "have you a family?"

"No, *suh.* Jes' me en mah ol' 'ooman."

"Can she cook?"

"Cook!" The genial titter again captured his dusky escort. "When she got de *fixens,* Ah reck'n she de beaten'es cook in dis heah county."

"How much do you earn, driving that hack?"

Uncle Jefferson ruminated. "Well, suh, 'pens on de weddah. Mighty lucky sometimes dis yeah ef Ah kin pay de groc'ry man."

"How would you both like to live here with me for a while? She could cook and you could take care of me."

Uncle Jefferson's eyes seemed to turn inward with mingled surprise and introspection. He shifted from one foot to the other, swallowed difficultly several times, and said, "Ah ain' nebbah seed yo' befo', suh."

"Well, I haven't seen you either, have I?"

"Dat's de trufe, suh, 'deed et is! Hyuh, hyuh! Whut Ah means ter say is dat de ol' 'ooman kain'

cook no fancy didoes like what dey eats up Norf. She kin jes' cook de Ferginey style."

"That sounds good to me," quoth Valiant. "I'll risk it. Now as to wages—"

"Ah ain' specticulous as ter de wages," said Uncle Jefferson. "Ah knows er gemman when Ah sees one. 'Sides, ter-day's Friday en et's baid luck. Ah sho' is troubled in mah min' wheddah we-all kin suit yo' perpensities, but Ah reck'n we kin take er try ef *yo'* kin."

"Then it's a bargain," responded Valiant with alacrity. "Can you come at once?"

"Yas, suh, me en Daph gwineter come ovah fus' thing in de mawnin'. Whut yo'-all gwineter do fo' yo' suppah?"

"I'll get along," Valiant assured him cheerfully. "Here is five dollars. You can buy some food and things to cook with, and bring them with you. Do you think there's a stove in the kitchen?"

"Ah reck'n," replied Uncle Jefferson. "En ef dar *ain'* Daph kin cook er Chris'mus dinnah wid fo' stones en er tin skillet. Yas, *suh!*"

He trudged away into the shadows, but presently, as the new master of Damory Court stood in the gloomy hall, he heard the shambling step again behind him. "Ah done neglectuated ter ax yo' name, suh. Ah did, fo' er fac'."

"My name is Valiant. John Valiant."

Uncle Jefferson's eyes turned upward and rolled

out of orbit. "Mah Lawd!" he ejaculated soundlessly. And with his wide lips still framed about the last word, he backed out of the doorway and disappeared.

CHAPTER XII

THE CASE OF MOROCCO LEATHER

ALONE in the ebbing twilight, John Valiant found his hamper, spread a napkin on the broad stone steps and took out a glass, a spoon and part of a loaf of bread. The thermos flask was filled with milk. It was not a splendid banquet, yet he ate it with as great content as the bulldog at his feet gnawed his share of the crust. He broke his bread into the milk as he had not done since he was a child, and ate the luscious pulp with a keen relish bred of the long outdoor day. When the last drop was gone he brushed up the very crumbs from the cloth, laughing to himself as he did so. It had been a long time since he remembered being so hungry!

It was almost dark when the meal was done and, depleted hamper in hand, he reentered the empty echoing house. He went into the library, lighted the great brass lamp from the motor and began to rummage. The drawers of the dining-room sideboard yielded nothing; on a shelf of the butler's pantry, however, was a tin box which proved to be half full of wax candles, perfectly preserved.

"The very thing!" he said triumphantly. Carrying them back, he fixed several in the glass-candlesticks and set them, lighted, all about the somber room till the soft glow flooded its every corner. "There," he said, "that is as it should be. No big blatant search-light here! And no glare of modern electricity would suit that old wainscoting, either." He looked up at the painting on the wall; it seemed as if the sneer had smoothed out, the hard cruel eye softened. "You needn't be afraid," he said, nodding. "I understand."

He dragged the leather settee to the porch and by the light of the motor-lamp dusted it thoroughly, and wheeling it back, set it under the portrait. He washed the glass from which he had dined and filled it at the cup of the garden fountain, put into it the rose from his hat and set it on the reading-stand. The small china dog caught his eye and he picked it up casually. The head came off in his hands. It had been a bon-bon box and was empty save for a narrow strip of yellowed paper, on which were written some meaningless figures: 17-28-94-0. He pondered this a moment, then thrust it into one of the empty pigeonholes of the desk. On the latter stood an old-fashioned leaf-calendar; the date it exposed was May 14th. Curiously enough the same date would recur to-morrow. The page bore a quotation: "Every man carries his fate on a riband about his neck." The line had been

quoted in his father's letter. May 14th! — how much that date and that motto may have meant for him!

He put the calendar back, filled his pipe and sat down facing the open bow-window. The dark was mysteriously lifting, the air filling with a soft silver-gray translucence that touched the wild growth as with a fairy gossamer. Presently, from between the still elms, the new sickle moon climbed into view. From the garden came a plaintive bird-cry, long-drawn and wavering and then, from farther away, the triple mellow whistle of a whip-poorwill.

The place was alive now with bird-notes, and he listened with a new delight. He thought suddenly, with a kind of impatient wonder, that never in his life had he sat perfectly alone in a solitude and listened to the voices of the night. The only out-of-doors he knew had been comprised in motor-whirls on frequented highroads, seashore, or mountain months where bridge and dancing were forever on the cards, or else such up-to-date " camping " as was indulged in at the Fargos' " shack " on the St. Lawrence. He sat now with his senses alert to a new world that his sophisticated eye and ear had never known. Something new was entering into him that seemed the spirit of the place; the blessing of the tall silver poplars outside, the

musical scented gardens and the moonlight laid like a placid benediction over all.

He rose to push the shutter wider and in the movement his elbow sent a shallow case of morocco leather that had lain on the desk crashing to the floor. It opened and a heavy metallic object rolled almost to his feet. He saw at a glance that it was an old-fashioned rusted dueling-pistol.

The box had originally held two pistols. He shuddered as he stooped to pick up the weapon, and with the crawling repugnance mingled a panging anger and humiliation. From his very babyhood it had always been so — that unconquerable aversion to the touch of a firearm. There had been moments in his youth when this unreasoning shrinking had filled him with a blind fury, had driven him to strange self-tests of courage. He had never been able to overcome it. He had always had a natural distaste for the taking of life; hunting was an unthinkable sport to him, and he regarded the lusty pursuit of small feathered or furry things for pleasure with a mingled wonder and contempt. But analyzation had told him that his peculiar abhorrence was no mere outgrowth of this. It lay far deeper. He had rarely, of recent years, met the test. Now, as he stood in these unaccustomed surroundings, with the cold touch of the metal the old shuddering held him, and the sweat broke in beads

on his forehead. Setting his teeth hard, he crossed the room, slipped the box with its pistol between the volumes of the bookcase, and returned to his seat.

The bulldog, aroused from a nap, thrust a warm muzzle between his knees. "It's uncanny, Chum!" he said, as his hand caressed the velvety head. "Why should the touch of that fool thing chill my spine and make my flesh tiptoe over my bones? Is it a mere peculiarity of temperament? Some men hate cats'-eyes. Some can't abide sitting on plush. I knew a chap once who couldn't see milk poured from a pitcher without getting goose-flesh. People are born that way, but there must be a cause. Why should I hate a pistol? Do you suppose I was shot in one of my previous existences?"

For a long while he sat there, his pipe dead, his eyes on the moonlighted out-of-doors. The eery feeling that had gripped him had gone as quickly as it had come. At last he rose, stretching himself with a great boyish yawn, put out all save one of the candles and taking a bath-robe, sandals and a huge fuzzy towel from the steamer-trunk, stripped leisurely. He donned the bath-robe and sandals and went out through the window to the garden and down to where lay the little lake ruffling silverly under the moon. On its brink he stopped, and tossing back his head, tried to imitate one of the bird-calls but was unsuccessful. With a rueful laugh

he threw off the bath-robe and stood an instant glistening, poised in the moonlight like a marble faun, before he dove, straight down out of sight.

Five minutes later he pulled himself up over the edge, his flesh tingling with the chill of the water, and drew the robe about his cool white shoulders. Then he thrust his feet into his sandals and sped quickly back. He rubbed himself to a glow, and blowing out the remaining candle, stretched himself luxuriously between the warm blankets on the couch. The dog sniffed inquiringly at his hand, then leaped up and snuggled down close to his feet.

The soft flooding moonlight sent its radiance into the gloomy room, touching lovingly its dark carven furniture and bringing into sharp relief the lithe contour of the figure under the fleecy coverlid, the crisp damp hair, the expressive face, and the wide-open dreamy eyes.

John Valiant's thoughts had fled a thousand miles away, to the tall girl who all his life had seemed to stand out from his world, aloof and unsurpassed — Katharine Fargo. He tried to picture her, a perfect chatelaine, graceful and gracious as a tall, white, splendid lily, in this dead house that seemed still to throb with living passions. But the picture subtly eluded him and he stirred uneasily under the blanket.

After a time his hand stretched out to the reading-stand and drew the glass with its vivid blossom

nearer, till, in his nostrils, its musky odor mingled with the dew-wet scent of the honeysuckle from the garden. At last his eyes closed. "Every man carries his fate . . . on a riband about his neck," he muttered drowsily, and then, "Roses . . . red roses . . ."

And so he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HUNT

HE awoke to a musical twittering and chirping, to find the sun pouring into the dusty room in a very glory. He rolled from the blanket and stood upright, filling his lungs with a long deep breath of satisfaction. He felt singularly light-hearted and alive. The bulldog came bounding through the window, dirty from the weeds, and flung himself upon his master in a canine rapture.

"Get out!" quoth the latter, laughing. "Stop licking my feet! How the dickens do you suppose I'm to get into my clothes with your ridiculous antics going on? Down, I say!"

He began to dress rapidly. "Listen to those birds, Chum!" he said. "There's an ornithological political convention going on out there. Wish I knew what they were chinning about — they're so mightily in earnest. See them splashing in that fountain? If you had any self-respect you'd be taking a bath yourself. You need it! Hark!" He broke off and listened. "Who's that singing?"

The sound drew nearer — a lugubrious chant, with the weirdest minor reflections, faintly sugges-

tive of the rag-time ditties of the music-halls, yet with a plaintive cadence:

"As he went mowin' roun' de fiel'
Er mocc'son bit him on de heel,
Right toodle-link-uh-day,
Right toodle-link-uh-day,
Right toodle-link-uh, toodle-link-uh,
Da-a-dee-e-eaye!

"Dey kyah'd him in ter his Sally deah.
She say, 'Mah lawd, yo' looks so queah!'
Right toodle-link-uh-day,
Right toodle-link-uh-day,
Right toodle-link-uh, toodle-link-uh,
Da-a-dee-e-e-aye!"

A smile of genuine delight crossed the listener's face. "That would make the everlasting fortune of a music-hall artist," Valiant muttered, as, coatless, and with a towel over his arm, he stepped to the piazza.

"Dey laid him down — spang on de groun'.
He-e-e shet-up-his-eyes en looked all aroun',
Right toodle-link-uh-day,
Right toodle-link-uh-day,
Right toodle-link-uh, toodle-link-uh,
Da-a-dee e-e-aye!

"So den he died, giv' up de Ghos'.
To Abrum's buzzum he did pos'—
Right toodle-link-uh-day,
Right toodle-link-uh-day—"

"Good morning, Uncle Jefferson."

The singer broke off his refrain, set down the twig-broom that he had been wielding and came toward him. "Mawnin', suh. Mawnin'," he said. "Hopes yo'-all slep' good. Ah reck'n dem ar birds woke yo' up; dey's makin' seh er 'miration."

"Thank you. Never slept better in my life. Am I laboring under a delusion when I imagine I smell coffee?"

Just then there came a voice from the open door of the kitchen: "Calls yo'se'f er *man,* yo' triflin' reconstructed niggah! W'en marstah gwineter git he brekfus' wid' yo' ramshacklin' eroun' wid dat dawg all dis Gawd's-blessid mawnin'? Go fotch some mo' fiah-wood dis minute. Yo' heah?"

A turbaned head poked itself through the door, with a good-natured leaf-brown face beneath it, which broadened into a wide smile as its owner bobbed energetically at Valiant's greeting. "Fo' de *Lawd!*" she exclaimed, wiping floury hands on a gingham apron. "Yo' sho' is up early, but Ah got yo' brekfus' mos' ready, suh."

"All right, Aunt Daphne. I'll be back directly."

He sped down to the lake to plunge his head into the cool water and thereby sharpen the edge of an appetite that needed no honing. From the little valley through which the stream meandered, rose a curdled mist, fraying now beneath the warming sun.

The tall tangled grass through which he passed was beaded with dew like diamonds and hung with a thousand fairy jeweled webs. The wild honeysuckle was alive with quick whirrings of hummingbirds, and he hung his pocket-mirror from a twig and shaved with a woodsy chorus in his ears.

He came up the trail again to find the reading-stand transferred to the porch and laid with a white cloth on which was set a steaming coffee-pot, with fresh cream, saltless butter and crisp hot biscuit; and as he sat down, with a sigh of pure delight, in his dressing-gown — a crêpy Japanese thing redeemed from womanishness by the bold green bamboo of its design — Uncle Jefferson planted before him a generous platter of bacon, eggs and potatoes. These he attacked with a surprising keenness. As he buttered his fifth biscuit he looked at the dog, rolling on his back in morning ecstasy, with a look of humorous surprise.

"Chum," he said, "what do you think of that? All my life a single roll and a cup of coffee have been the most I could ever negotiate for breakfast, and then it was apt to taste like chips and whetstones. And now look at this plate!" The dog ceased winnowing his ear with a hind foot and looked back at his master with much the same expression. Clearly his own needs had not been forgotten.

"Reck'n Ah bettah go ter git dat ar machine

thing," said Uncle Jefferson behind him. "Ol' 'ooman, heah, she 'low ter fix up de kitchen dis mawnin' en we begin on de house dis evenin'."

"Right-o," said Valiant. "It's all up-hill, so the motor won't run away with you. Aunt Daphne, can you get some help with the cleaning?"

"He'p?" that worthy responded with fine scorn. "*No,* suh. Moughty few, in de town 'cep'n low-down yaller new-issue trash det ain' wu'f killin'! Ah gwineter go fo' dat house mahse'f 'fo' long, hammah en tongs, en git it fix' up!"

"Splendid! My destiny is in your hands. You might take the dog with you, Uncle Jefferson; the run will do him good."

When the latter had disappeared and truculent sounds from the kitchen indicated that the era of strenuous cleaning had begun, he reentered the library, changed the water in the rose-glass and set it on the edge of the shady front porch, where its flaunting blossom made a dash of bright crimson against the grayed weather-beaten brick. This done, he opened the one large room on the ground-floor that he had not visited.

It was double the size of the library, a parlor hung in striped yellow silk vaguely and tenderly faded, with a tall plate mirror set over a marble-topped console at either side. In one corner stood a grand piano of Circassian walnut with keys of tinted mother-of-pearl and a slender music-rack inlaid with

morning-glories in the same material. From the center of the ceiling, above an oval table, depended a great chandelier hung with glass prisms. He drew his handkerchief across the table; beneath the disfiguring dust it showed a highly polished surface inlaid with different colored woods, in an intricate Italian-like landscape. The legs of the consoles were bowed, delicately carved, and of gold-leaf. The chairs and sofas were covered with dusty slip-covers of muslin. He lifted one of these. The tarnished gold furniture was Louis XV, the upholstery of yellow brocade with a pattern of pink roses. Two Japanese hawthorn vases sat on teak-wood stands and a corner held a glass cabinet containing a collection of small ivories and faience.

His appreciative eye kindled. "What a room!" he muttered. "Not a jarring note anywhere! That's an old Crowe and Christopher piano. I'll get plenty of music out of that! You don't see such chandeliers outside of palaces any more except in the old French châteaus. It holds a hundred candles if it holds one! I never knew before all there was in that phrase 'the candle-lighted fifties.' I can imagine what it looked like, with the men in white stocks and flowered waistcoats and the women in their crinolines and red-heeled slippers, bowing to the minuet under that candle-light! I'll bet the girls bred in this neighborhood won't take much to the turkey-trot and the bunny-hug!"

He went thoughtfully back to the great hall, where sat the big chest on which lay the volume of *Lucile*. He pushed down the antique wrought-iron hasp and threw up the lid. It was filled to the brim with textures: heavy portières of rose-damask, table-covers of faded soft-toned tapestry, window-hangings of dull green — all with tobacco-leaves laid between the folds and sifted thickly over with the sparkling white powder. At the bottom, rolled in tarry-smelling paper, he found a half-dozen thin, Persian prayer-rugs.

"Phew!" he whistled. "I certainly ought to be grateful to that law firm that 'inspected' the place. Think of the things lying here all these years! And that powder everywhere! It's done the work, too, for there's not a sign of moth. If I'm not careful, I'll stumble over the family plate — it seems to be about the only thing wanting."

The mantelpiece, beneath the shrouded elk's head, was of gray marble in which a crest was deeply carved. He went close and examined it. "A sable greyhound, rampant, on a field argent," he said. "That's my own crest, I suppose." There touched him again the same eery sensation of acquaintance that had possessed him with his first sight of the house-front. "Somehow it's familiar," he muttered; "where have I seen it before?"

He thought a moment, then went quickly into the library and began to ransack the trunk. At length he found a small box containing keepsakes of various kinds. He poured the medley on to the table — an uncut moonstone, an amethyst-topped pencil that one of his tutors had given him as a boy, a tiger's claw, a compass and what-not. Among them was a man's seal-ring with a crest cut in a cornelian. He looked at it closely. It was the same device.

The ring had been his father's. Just when or how it had come into his possession he could never remember. It had lain among these keepsakes so many years that he had almost forgotten its existence. He had never worn a ring, but now, as he went back to the hall, he slipped it on his finger. The motto below the crest was worn away, but it showed clear in the marble of the hall-mantel: *I clinge.*

His eyes turned from the carven words and strayed to the pleasant sunny foliage outside. An arrogant boast, perhaps, yet in the event well justified. Valiants had held that selfsame slope when the encircling forests had rung with war-whoop and blazed with torture-fire. They had held on through Revolution and Civil War. Good and bad, abiding and lawless, every generation had cleaved stubbornly to its acres. *I clinge.* His father had clung through absence that seemed to have been almost

exile, and now he, the last Valiant, was come to make good the boast.

His gaze wavered. The tail of his eye had caught through the window a spurt of something dashing and vivid, that grazed the corner of a far-off field. He craned his neck, but it had passed the line of his vision. The next moment, however, there came trailing on the satiny stillness the high-keyed ululation of a horn, and an instant later a long-drawn *hallo-o-o!* mixed with a pattering chorus of yelps.

He went close, and leaning from the sill, shaded his eyes with his hand. The noise swelled and rounded in volume; it was nearing rapidly. As he looked, the hunt dashed into full view between the tree-boles — a galloping mêlée of khaki and scarlet, swarming across the fresh green of a wheat field, behind a spotted swirl of hounds. It mounted a rise, dipped momentarily into a gully and then, in a narrow sweeping curve, came pounding on up the long slope, directly toward the house.

"Confound it!" said John Valiant belligerently; "they're on my land!"

They were near enough now for him to hear the voices of the men, calling encouragement to the dogs, and to see the white ribbons of foam across the flanks of the laboring horses. One scarlet-coated feminine rider, detached from the bunch, had spurred in advance and was leading by a clean hun-

dred yards, bareheaded, her hat fallen back to the limit of its ribbon knotted under her chin, and her waving hair gleaming like tarnished gold.

"How she rides!" muttered the solitary watcher. "Cross-saddle, of course,— the sensible little sport! She'll never in the world do that wall! — Yes, by George!" For, with a beseeching cry and a straining tug, she had fairly lifted her big golden-chestnut hunter over the high barrier in a leap as clean as the flight of a flying squirrel. He saw her lean forward to pat the wet arching neck as the horse settled again into its pace.

John Valiant's admiration turned to delight. "Why," he said, "it's the Lady-of-the-Roses!"

He put his hands on the sill and vaulted to the porch.

CHAPTER XIV

SANCTUARY

THE tawny scudding streak that led that long chase had shot into the yard, turning for a last desperate double. It saw the man in the foreground and its bounding, agonized little wild heart that so prayed for life, gave way. With a final effort, it gained the porch and crouched down in its corner, an abject, sweated, hunted morsel, at hopeless bay.

Like a flash, Valiant stooped, caught the shivering thing by the scruff, and as its snapping jaws grazed his thumb, dropped it through the open window behind him. "Sanctuary!" quoth he, and banged the shutter to.

At the same instant, as the place overflowed with a pandemonium of nosing leaping hounds, he saw the golden chestnut reined sharply down among the ragged box-rows, with a shamefaced though brazen knowledge that the girl who rode it had seen.

She sat moveless, her head held high, one hand on the hunter's foam-flecked neck, and their glances met like crossed swords. The look stirred something vague and deep within him. For an unfor-

gettable instant their eyes held each other, in a gaze rigid, challenging, almost defiant; then it broke and she turned to the rest of the party spurring in a galloping zigzag: a genial-faced man of middle age in khaki who sat his horse like a cavalryman, a younger one with a reckless dark face and straight black hair, and following these a half-dozen youthful riders of both sexes, one of the lads heavily plastered with mud from a wet cropper, and the girls chiefly gasps and giggles.

The elder of the two men pulled up beside the leader, his astonished eyes sweeping the house-front, with its open blinds, the wisp of smoke curling from the kitchen chimney. He said something to her, and she nodded. The younger man, meanwhile, had flung himself from his horse, a wild-eyed roan, and with his arm thrust through its bridle, strode forward among the welter of hounds, where they scurried at fault, hither and thither, yelping and eager.

"What rotten luck!" he exclaimed. "Gone to ground after twelve miles! After him, Tawny! You mongrels! Do you imagine he's up a tree? After him, Bulger! Bring him here!"

He glanced up, and for the first time saw the figure in tweeds looking on. Valiant was attracted by his face, its dash and generosity overlying its inherent profligacy and weakness. Dark as the girl was light, his features had the same delicate chisel-

ing, the inbreeding, nobility and indulgence of generations. He stared a moment, and the somewhat supercilious look traveled over the gazer, from dusty boots to waving brown hair.

"Oh!" he said. His view slowly took in the evidences of occupation. "The house is open, I see. Going to get it fit for occupancy, I presume?"

"Yes."

The other turned. "Well, Judge Chalmers, what do you think of that? The unexpected has happened at last." He looked again at the porch. "Who's to occupy it?"

"The owner."

"Wonders will never cease!" said the young man easily, shrugging. "Well, our quarry is here somewhere. From the way the dogs act I should say he's bolted into the house. With your permission I'll take one of them in and see." He stooped and snapped a leash on a dog-collar.

"I'm really very sorry," said Valiant, "but I'm living in it at present."

The edge of a smile lifted the carefully trained mustache over the other's white teeth. It had the perfectly courteous air of saying, "Of course, if you say so. But—"

Valiant turned, with a gesture that included all. "If you care to dismount and rest," he said, "I shall be honored, though I'm afraid I can't offer you such hospitality as I should wish."

The judge raised his broad soft hat. "Thank you, sir," he said, with a soft accent that delightfully disdained the letter "r." "But we mustn't intrude any further. As you know, of course, the place has been uninhabited for any number of years, and we had no idea it was to acquire a tenant. You will overlook our riding through, I hope. I'm afraid the neighborhood has got used to considering this a sort of no-man's land. It's a pleasure to know that the Court is to be reclaimed, sir. Come along, Chilly," he added. "Our fox has a burrow under the house, I reckon — hang the cuning little devil!"

He whistled sharply to the dogs, who came leaping about his horse's legs for their meed of praise — and clubbing. "Down, Fan! Down Trojan! Come on, you young folks, to breakfast. We've had a prime run of it, anyhow, and we'll put him up another day."

He waved his hat at the porch and turned his horse down the path, side by side with the golden chestnut. After them trooped the others, horses walking wearily, riders talking in low voices, the girls turning often to send swift bird-like glances behind them to where the straight masculine figure still stood with the yellow sunshine on his face. They did not leap the wall this time, but filed decorously through the swinging gate to the Red Road. Then, as they passed from view behind the

hedges, John Valiant heard the younger voices break out together like the sound of a bomb thrown into a poultry-yard.

After a time he saw the straggling bunch of riders emerge at a slow canter on the far-away field. He saw the roan spurred beside the golden chestnut and both dashed away, neck and neck in a race, the light patrician form of the man leaning far forward and the girl swaying to the pace as if she and her hunter were one.

John Valiant stood watching till the last rider was out of sight. There was a warm flush of color in his face.

At length he turned with the ghost of a sigh, opened the hall door wide and stalking a hundred yards away, sat down on the shady grass and began to whistle, with his eyes on the door.

Presently he was rewarded. On a sudden, around the edge of the sill peered a sharp, suspicious little muzzle. Then, like a flash of tawny light, the fox broke sanctuary and shot for the thicket.

CHAPTER XV

MRS. POLY GIFFORD PAYS A CALL

THE brown ivied house in the village was big and square and faced the sleepy street. Its front was gay with pink oleanders in green tubs and the yard spotted with annual encampments of geraniums and marigolds. A one-storied wing contained a small door with a doctor's brass plate on the clapboarding beside it. Doctor Southall was one of Mrs. Merryweather Mason's paying guests — for she would have deemed the word boarder a gratuitous insult, no less to them than to her. Another was the major, who for a decade had occupied the big old-fashioned corner-room on the second floor, companioned by a monstrous gray cat and waited on by an ancient negro named Jereboam, who had been a slave of his father's.

The doctor was a sallow taciturn man with a saturnine face, eyebrows like frosted thistles, a mouth as if made with one quick knife-slash and a head nearly bald, set on a neck that would not have disqualified a yearling ox. His broad shoulders were slightly stooped, and his mouth wore habitually an expression half resentful, half sardonic,

conveying a cynical opinion of the motives of the race in general and of the special depravity of that particular countryside. Altogether he exhaled an air in contrast to which the major's old-school blend of charm and courtesy seemed an almost ribald frivolity.

On this particular morning neither the major nor the doctor was in evidence, the former having gone out early, and the latter being at the moment in his office, as the brassy buzz of a telephone from time to time announced. Two of the green wicker rocking-chairs on the porch, however, were in agitant commotion. Mrs. Mason was receiving a caller in the person of Mrs. Napoleon Gifford.

The latter had a middle-aged affection for baby-blue and a devouring penchant for the ages and antecedents of others, at times irksome to those to whom her "Let me see. You went to school with my first husband's sister, didn't you?" or "Your daughter Jane must have been married the year the old Israel Stamper place was burned," were unwelcome reminders of the pace of time. To-day, of course, the topic was the new arrival at Damory Court.

"After all these *years!*" the visitor was saying in her customary italics. (The broad "a" which lent a dulcet softness to the speech of her hostess was scorned by Mrs. Poly, her own "a's" being as narrow as the needle through which the rich man

reaches heaven.)" "We came here from Richmond when I was a bride — that's twenty-one years ago — and Damory Court was forsaken then. And think what a condition the house must be in now! Cared for by an agent who comes every other season from New York. Trust a *man* to do work like that!"

"I'm glad a Valiant is to occupy it," remarked Mrs. Mason in her sweet flute-like voice. "It would be sad to see any one else there. For after all, the Valiants were gentlemen."

Mrs. Gifford sniffed. "Would you have called Devil-John Valiant a gentleman? Why, he earned the name by the dreadful things he did. My grandfather used to say that when his wife lay sick — he hated her, you know — he would gallop his horse with all his hounds full-cry after him under her windows. Then that *ghastly* story of the slave he pressed to death in the hogshead of tobacco."

"I know," acquiesced Mrs. Mason. "He was a cruel man, and wicked, too. Yet of course he was a gentleman. In the South the test of a gentleman has never been what he *does,* but who he *is.* Devil-John was splendid, for all his wickedness. He was the best swordsman in all Virginia. It used to be said there was a portrait of him at Damory Court, and that during the war, in the engagement on the hillside, a bullet took out one of

its eyes. But his grandson, Beauty Valiant, who lived at Damory Court thirty years ago, wasn't his type at all. He was only twenty-five when the duel occurred."

"He must have been brilliant," said the visitor, "to have founded that great Corporation. It's a pity the son didn't take after him. Have you seen the *papers* lately? It seems that though he was to blame for the wrecking of the concern they can't do anything to him. Some technicality in the law, I suppose. But if a man is only rich enough they can't convict him of anything. Why he should suddenly make up his mind to come down *here* I *can't* see. With that old affair of his father's behind him, I should think he'd prefer Patagonia."

"I take it, then, madam," Doctor Southall's forbidding voice rose from the doorway, "that you are familiar with the circumstances of that old affair, as you term it?"

The lady bridled. Her passages at arms with the doctor did not invariably tend to sweeten her disposition. "I'm sure I only know what people say," she said.

"'People?'" snorted the doctor irascibly. "Just another name for a community that's a perfect sink of meanness and malice. If one believed all he heard here he'd quit speaking to his own grandmother."

"You will admit, I suppose," said Mrs. Gifford

with some spirit, "that the name Valiant isn't what it used to be in this neighborhood?"

"I will, madam," responded the doctor. "When Valiant left this place (a mark of good taste, I've always considered it) he left it the worse, if possible, for his departure. Your remark, however, would seem to imply demerit on his part. Was he the only man who ever happened to be at the lucky end of a dueling-ground?"

"Then it isn't true that Valiant was a dead shot and Sassoon intoxicated?"

"Madam," said the doctor, "I have no wish to discuss the details of that unhappy incident with you or anybody else. I was one of those present, but the circumstances you mention have never been descanted upon by me. I merely wish to point out that the people whom you have been quoting, are not only a set of ignoramuses with cotton-back souls, but as full of uncharitableness as an egg is of meat."

"I see by the papers," said Mrs. Gifford, with an air of resignedly changing the subject, "they've been investigating the failure of the Valiant Corporation. The son seems to be getting the sharp end of the stick. Perhaps he's coming down here because they've made it so hot for him in New York. Well, I'm afraid he'll find *this* county disappointing."

"He will that!" agreed the doctor savagely.

"No doubt he imagines he's coming to a kindly countryside of gentle-born people with souls and imaginations; he'll find he's lit in a section that's entirely too ready to hack at his father's name and prepared in advance to call him Northern scum and turn up its nose at his accent — a community so full of dyed-in-the-wool snobbery that it would make Boston look like a poor-white barbecue. I'm sorry for *him!*"

Mrs. Gifford, having learned wisdom from experience, resisted the temptation to reply. She merely rocked a trifle faster and turned a smile which she strove to make amusedly deprecative upon her hostess. Just then from the rear of the house came a strident voice:

"Yo', Raph'el! Take yo' han's outer dem cherries! Don' yo' know ef yo' swallahs dem ar pits, yo' gwineter hab 'pende*geet*us en lump up en die?"

The sound of a slap and a shrill yelp followed, and around the porch dashed an infantile darky, as nude as a black Puck, with his hands full of cherries, who came to a sudden demoralized stop in the embarrassing foreground.

"Raph!" thundered the doctor. "Didn't I tell you to go back to that kitchen?"

"Yas, suh," responded the imp. "But yo' didn' tell me ter stay dar!"

"If I see you out here again," roared the doctor, "I'll tie your ears back — and *grease* you — and

SWALLOW you!" At which grisly threat, the apparition, with a shrill shriek, turned and ran desperately for the corner of the house.

"I hear," said the doctor, resuming, "that the young man who came to fix the place up has hired Uncle Jefferson and his wife to help him. Who's responsible for that interesting information?"

"Rickey Snyder," said Mrs. Mason. "She's got a spy-glass rigged up in a sugar-tree at Miss Mattie Sue's and she saw them pottering around there this morning."

"Little *limb!*" exclaimed Mrs. Gifford, with emphasis. "She's as cheeky as a town-hog. I can't imagine what Shirley Dandridge was thinking of when she brought that low-born child out of her sphere."

Something like a growl came from the doctor as he struck open the screen-door. "'Limb!' I'll bet ten dollars she's an angel in a cedar-tree at a church fair compared with some better-born young ones I know of who are only fit to live when they've got the scarlet-fever and who ought to be in the reformatory long ago. And as for Shirley Dandridge, it's my opinion she and her mother and a few others like her have got about the only drops of the milk of human kindness in this whole abandoned community!"

"Dreadful man!" said Mrs. Gifford, sotto voce, as the door banged viciously. "To think of his

being born a Southall! Sometimes I can't believe it!"

Mrs. Mason shook her head and smiled. "Ah, but that isn't the real Doctor Southall," she said. "That's only his shell."

"I've heard that he has another side," responded the other with guarded grimness, "but if he has, I wish he'd manage to show it sometimes."

Mrs. Mason took off her glasses and wiped them carefully. "I saw it when my husband died," she said softly. "That was before you came. They were old friends, you know. He was sick almost a year, and the doctor used to carry him out here on the porch every day in his arms, like a child. And then, when the typhus came that summer among the negroes, he quarantined himself with them — the only white man there — and treated and nursed them and buried the dead with his own hands, till it was stamped out. That's the real Doctor Southall."

The rockers vibrated in silence for a moment. Then Mrs. Gifford said: "I never knew before that he had anything to do with that duel. Was he one of Valiant's seconds?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Mason; "and the major was the other. I was a little girl when it happened. I can barely remember it, but it made a big sensation."

"And over a love-affair!" exclaimed Mrs. Gif-

ford in the tone of one to whom romance was daily bread.

"I suppose it was."

"Why, my *dear!* Of *course* it was. That's always been the story. What on earth have men to fight duels about except us women? They only *pretend* it's cards or horses. Trust me, there's always a pair of silk stockings at the bottom of it! Girls are so thoughtless — though you and I were just as bad, I suppose, if we only remembered! — and they don't realize that it's sometimes a serious thing to trifle with a man. That is, of course, if he's of a certain type. *I* think our Virginian girls flirt outrageously. They quit only at the church door (though I *will* say they generally stop then) and they take a man's ring without any idea whatever of the sacredness of an engagement. You remember Ilsa Eustis who married the man from Petersburg? She was engaged to two men at once, and used to wear whichever ring belonged to the one who was coming to see her. One day they came together. She was in the yard when they stopped at the horse-block. Well, she tied her handkerchief round her hand and said she'd burned herself pulling candy. (No, neither one of them was the man from Petersburg.) When she was married, one of them wrote her and asked for his ring. It had seven diamonds set in the shape of a cross. I'm telling you this in confidence, just as

it was told to me. She didn't write a reply — she only sent him a telegram: 'Simply to thy cross I cling.' She wears the stones yet in a bracelet."

For a time the conversation languished. Then Mrs. Gifford asked suddenly: "*Who* do you suppose she could have been? — the girl behind that old Valiant affair."

Mrs. Mason shook her head. "No one knows for certain — unless, of course, the major or the doctor, and I wouldn't question either of them for worlds. You see, people had stopped gossiping about it before I was out of school."

"But surely your husband —"

"The only quarrel we had while we were engaged was over that. I tried to make him tell me. I imagined from something he said then that the young men who *did* know had pledged one another not to speak of it."

"I wonder why?" said the other thoughtfully.

"Oh, undoubtedly out of regard for the girl. I've always thought it so decent of them! If there was a girl in the case, her position must have been unpleasant enough, if she was not actually heartbroken. Imagine the poor thing, knowing that wherever she went, people would be saying: 'She's the one they fought the duel over! Look at her!' If she grieved, they'd say she'd been crazy in love with Sassoon, and point out the dark circles under her eyes, and wonder if she'd ever get over it.

If she didn't mope, they'd say she was in love with Valiant and was glad it was Sassoon who was shot. If she shut herself up, they'd say she had no pride; if she didn't, they'd say she had no heart. It was far better to cover the story up and let it die."

But the subject was too fascinating for her morning visitor to abandon. "She probably loved one of them," she said. "I wonder which it was. I'll ask the major when I see him. *I'm* not afraid. He can't eat me! Wouldn't it be *curious,*" she continued, "if it should be somebody who lives here now — whom we've always known! I can't think who it could have been, though. There's Jenny Quarles — she's eight years older than we are, if she's a day — she was a nice little thing, but you couldn't *dream* of anybody ever fighting a duel over her. There's Polly Pendleton, and Berenice Garland — they must have been about the right age, and they never married — but no, it *couldn't* have been either of them. The only other spinster I can think of is Miss Mattie Sue, and she was as poor as Job's turkey and teaching school. Besides, she must have been years and years too old. Hush! There's Major Bristow at the gate now. And the doctor's just coming out again."

The major wore a suit of white linen, with a broad-brimmed straw hat, and a pink was in his button-hole, but to the observing, his step might

have seemed to lack an accustomed jauntiness. As he came up the path the doctor opened his office door. Standing on the threshold, his legs wide apart and his hands under his coat-tails, he nodded grimly across the marigolds. "How do you feel this morning, Major."

"Feel?" rumbled the major; "the way any gentleman ought to feel this time of the morning, sah. Like hell, sah."

The doctor bent his gaze on the hilarious blossom in the other's lapel. "If I were you, Bristow," he said scathingly, "I reckon I'd quit galivanting around to bridge-fights with perfumery on my handkerchief every evening. It's a devil of an example to the young."

The rocking-chairs behind the screening vines became motionless, and the ladies exchanged surreptitious smiles. If the two gentlemen were aware of each other's sterling qualities, their mutual appreciation was in inverse ratio to its expression, and, as the Elucinian mysteries, cloaked before the world. In public the doctor was wont to remark that the major talked like a Cæsar, looked like a piano-tuner and was the only man he had ever seen who could strut sitting down. Never were his gibes so barbed as when launched against the major's white-waistcoated and patrician calm, and conversely, never did the major's bland suavity so nearly approach an undignified irritation as when

receiving the envenomed darts of that accomplished cynic.

The major settled his black tie. "A little wholesome exercise wouldn't be a bad thing for you, Doctor," he said succinctly. "You're looking a shade pasty to-day."

"Exercise!" snapped the other viciously, as he pounded down the steps. "Ha, ha! I suppose you exercise — lazying out to the Dandridges once a week for a julep, and the rest of the time wearing out good cane-bottoms and palm-leaf fans and cussing at the heat. You'll go off with apoplexy one of these days."

"I shall if they're scared enough to call *you*," the major shot after him, nettled. But the doctor did not pause. He went on down the street without turning his head.

The major lifted his hat gallantly to the ladies, whose presence he had just observed. "I reckon," he said, as he found the string of his glasses and adjusted them to gaze after the retreating form; "I reckon if I did have apoplexy, I'd want Southall to handle the case, but the temptation to get one in on him is sometimes a little too much for me."

"*Do* sit down, Major," said Mrs. Gifford. "There's a question I'm just dying to ask you. We've had *such* an interesting conversation. You've heard the news, of course, that young Mr. Valiant is coming to Damory Court?"

The major sat down heavily. In the bright light his face seemed suddenly pale and old.

"No?" the lady's tone was arch. "Have all the rest of us *really* got ahead of you for once? Yes, it's true. There's some one there getting it to rights. Now here's the question. There was a woman, of course, at the bottom of the Valiant duel. I'd never *dream* of asking you who she was. But which was it she loved, Valiant or Sassoon?"

CHAPTER XVI

THE ECHO

WHEN the major entered his room, Jereboam, his ancient body-servant, was dawdling about putting things to rights, his seamed visage under his white wool suggesting a charred stump beneath a crisp powdering of snow. "Jedge Chalmahs done tellyfoam ter ax yo' ovah ter Gladden Hall ter suppah ter-night, suh," he said. "De jedge 'low he gwine git eben wid yo' fo' dat las' game ob pokah when yo' done lam him."

"Tell him not to-night, Jerry," said the other wearily. "Some other time."

The old darky ruminated as he plodded down to the doctor's telephone. "Whut de mattah now? He got dat ar way-off-yondah look ergen." He shook his head forebodingly. "Ah heahed he hummin' dat tune when he dress hisse'f dis mawnin'. Sing befo' yo' eat, cry befo' yo' sleep!"

The major had, indeed, a far-away look as he sat there, a heavy lonely figure, that bright morning. It had slipped to his face with the news of the arrival at Damory Court. He told himself that he felt queer. A mocking-bird was singing in a

tulip-tree outside, and the gray cat sat on the window-sill, watching the foliage with blinking lust. There was no breeze and the leaves of the Virginia creeper that curled about the sash were trembling with the sensuous delight of the sunshine. Suddenly he seemed to hear elfin voices close to his ear:

"Which was it she loved? Valiant or Sassoon?"

It was so distinct that he started, vexed and disturbed. Really, it was absurd. He would be seeing things next! "Southall may be right about that exercise," he muttered; "I'll walk more." He began the projected reform without delay, striding up and down the room. But the little voices presently sounded again, shouting like gnomes inside a hill:

"Which was it? Valiant or Sassoon?"

"I wish to God I knew!" said the major roughly, standing still. It silenced them, but the sound of his own voice, as though it had been a preconcerted signal, drew together a hundred inchoate images of other days. There was the well-ordered garden of Damory Court — it rose up, gloomy with night shadows, across his great clothes-press against the wall — with himself sitting on a rustic bench smoking and behind him the candle-lighted library window with Beauty Valiant pacing up and down, waiting for daylight. There was a sun-lighted stretch between two hemlocks, with Southall and

he measuring the ground — the grass all dewy sparkles and an early robin teetering on a thorn-bush. Eight — nine — ten — he caught himself counting the paces.

He wiped his forehead. Between the hemlocks now were two figures facing each other, one twitching uncertainly, the other palely rigid; and at one side, held screen-wise, a raised umbrella. In some ghostly way he could see straight through the latter — see the doctor's hand gripping the handle, his own, outstretched beyond its edge, holding a handkerchief ready to flutter down. A silly subterfuge those umbrellas, but there must be no actual witnesses to the final act of a "gentlemen's meeting"! A silly code, the whole of it, now happily outgrown! He thought thus with a kind of dumb irritant wonder, while the green picture hung a moment — as a stone thrown in air hangs poised at height before it falls — then dissolved itself in two sharp crackles, with a gasping interval between. The scene blurred into a single figure huddling down — huddling down —

"*Which did she love?*" The major shook his head helplessly. It was, after all, only the echo, become all at once audible on a shallow woman's lips, of a question that had always haunted him. It had first come to him on the heels of that duel, when he had stood, somewhat later that hateful morning, holding a saddled horse before the big

pillared porch. It had whispered itself then from every moving leaf. *"Sassoon or Valiant?"* If she had loved Sassoon, of what use the letter Valiant was so long penning in the library? But — if it were Valiant she loved? The man who, having sworn not to lift his hand against the other, had broken his sacred word to her! Who had stained the unwritten code by facing an opponent maddened with liquor! Yet, what was there a woman might not condone in the one man? Would she read, forgive and send for him?

The major laughed out suddenly, harshly, in the quiet room, and looked down as if he expected to see that letter still lying in his hand. But the laugh could not still a regular pulsing sound that was in his ears — elfin like the voices, but as distinct — the sound of a horse's hoofs going from Damory Court.

He had heard those hoof-beats echo in his brain for thirty years!

CHAPTER XVII

THE TRESPASSER

TILL the sun was high John Valiant lay on his back in the fragrant grass, meditatively watching a bucaneering chicken-hawk draw widening circles against the blue and listening to the vibrant tattoo of a "pecker-wood" on a far-away tree, and the timorous wet whistle of a bob-white. The sun shone through the tracery of the foliage, making a quivering mosaic of light and shadow all about him. A robin ran across the grass with his breast puffed out as if he had been stealing apples; now and then an inquisitive yellow-hammer darted above and in the bushes cardinals wove slender sharp flashes of living crimson. The whole place was very quiet now. For just one thrilling moment it had burgeoned into sound and movement: when the sweaty horses had stood snorting and stamping in the yard with the hounds scampering between their legs and the riding-coats winking like rubies in the early sunshine!

Had she recognized him as the smudged tinkerer of the stalled car? "She saw me drop that wretched

brute through the window," he chuckled. "I could take oath to that. But she didn't give me away, true little sport that she was. And she won't. I can't think of any reason, but I know." The chuckle broadened to an appreciative grin. "What an ass she must have thought me! To risk a nasty bite and rob her of her brush into the bargain! How she looked at me, just for a minute, with that thoroughbred face, out of those sea-deep eyes, under that whorling, marvelous heaped-up hair of hers! Was she angry? I wonder!"

At length he rose and went back to the house. With a bunch of keys he had found he went to the stables, after some difficulty gained access, and propped the crazy doors and windows open to the sun. The building was airy and well-lighted and contained a dozen roomy box-stalls, a spacious loft and a carriage-house. The straw bedding had been unremoved, mice-gnawed sacking and rotted hay lay in the mangers, and the warped harness, hanging on its pegs, was a smelly mass of mildew and decay. In the carriage-house were three vehicles — a coach with rat-riddled upholstery and old-fashioned hoop-iron springs eaten through with rust, a rockaway and a surrey. The latter had collapsed where it stood. He found a stick, mowed away the festooning cobwebs, and moved the débris piece-meal.

"There!" he said with satisfaction. "There's a

place for the motor — if Uncle Jefferson ever gets it here."

It was noon when he returned, after a wash-up in the lake, to the meal with which Aunt Daphne, in a costume dimly suggestive of a bran-meal poultice with a gingham apron on, regaled him. Fried chicken, corn-bread so soft and fluffy that it had to be lifted from the pan with a spoon, browned potatoes, and to his surprise, fresh milk. "Ah done druv ouah ol' cow ovah, suh," explained Aunt Daphne. "'Case she gotter be milked, er she run dry ez de Red Sea fo' de chillen ob Izril."

"Aunt Daphne," inquired Valiant with his mouth full, "what do you call this green thing?"

"Dat? Dat's jes' turnip-tops, suh, wid er hunk er bacon in de pot. Laws-er-me, et cert'n'y do me good ter see yo' git arter it dat way, suh. Reck'n yo' got er appertite! Hyuh, Hyuh!"

"I have. I never guessed it before, and it's a magnificent discovery. However, it suggests unwelcome reflections. Aunt Daphne, how long do you estimate a man can dine like this on — well, say on a hundred dollars?"

"Er hun'ed dollahs, suh? Dat's er right smart heap o' money, 'deed et is! Well, suh, 'pen's on whut yo' raises. Ef yo' raises yo' own gyarden-sass, en chick'ns en aigs, Ah reck'n yo' kin live longah dan dat ar Methoosalum, en still hab mos' of it in de ol' stockin'."

"Ah! I can grow all those things myself, you think?"

"Yo' cert'n'y *kin,*" said Aunt Daphne. "Ev'y-body do. De chick'ns done peck fo' deyselves en de yuddah things — yo' o'ny gotter 'courage 'em en dey jes' grows."

Valiant ate his dessert with a thoughtful smile wrinkling his brow. As he pushed back his chair he smote his hands together and laughed aloud. "Back to the soil!" he said. "John Valiant, farmer! The miracle of it is that it sounds good to me. I *want* to raise my own grub and till my own soil. I want to be my own man! And I'm beginning to see my way. Crops will have to wait for another season, but there's water and pasture for cattle now. There's timber — lots of it — on that hillside, too. I must look into that."

He filled his pipe and climbed the staircase to the upper floor. Here the lower hall was duplicated. He proceeded slowly and carefully with the dusty task of window-opening. There were many bedrooms with great four-posted, canopied beds and old-fashioned carved furniture of mahogany and curly-maple, and in one he found a great cedar-lined chest filled with bed-linen and napery. In these rooms were more evidences of decay. They showed in faded hues, streaked and discolored finishings, yellow mildew beneath the glass of framed engravings and unsightly stains on walls and floors

from leaks in the roof. On a dainty dressing-table had been left a pin-cushion; its stuffing was strewn in a tiny trickling trail to a mouse-hole in the base-board. The bedroom he mentally chose for his own was the plainest of all, and was above the library, fronting the vagabond garden. It had a great black desk with many glass-knobbed drawers and a book-rack. The volumes this contained were mostly of the historical sort: a history of the *Middle Plantation, Meade's Old Churches,* and at the end a parchment-bound tome inscribed *The Valiants of Virginia.*

He lingered longest in a room over whose door was painted *The Hilarium.* It had evidently been a nursery and schoolroom. Here on the walls were many shelves wound over with networks of cobwebs, and piled with the oddest assemblage of toys: wooden and splintered soldiers that had once been bravely painted, dolls in various states of worn-outness — one rag doll in a calico dress with shoe-button eyes and a string of bright glass beads round her neck — a wooden box of marbles, a tattered boxing-glove. There were school-books, too, thumbed and dog-eared, from *First Reader* to Cæsar's *Gallic Wars,* with names of small Valiants scrawled on their fly-leaves. He carefully relocked the door of this room; he wanted to dust those toys and books with his own hands.

In the upper hall again he leaned from the win-

dow, sniffing the far-flung scent of orchards and peach-blown fence-rows. The soft whirring sound of a bird's wing went past, almost brushing his startled face, and the old oaks seemed to stretch their bent limbs with a faithful brute-like yawn of pleasure. In the room below he could hear the vigorous sound of Aunt Daphne's hard-driven broom and the sound flooded the echoing space with a comfortable commotion.

The present task was one after Aunt Daphne's own heart. A small mountain of dust was growing on the terrace, and as beneath brush and rag the colors of wall and parquetry stood forth, her face became one shiny expanse of ebony satisfaction. When the bulldog, returning from his jaunt, outstripping Uncle Jefferson, bounced in to prance against her she smote him lustily with her scrubbing-brush.

"Git outer heah, yo' good-fo'-nuthin' w'ite rapscallyun! Gwine trapse yo' muddy feet all ovah dis yeah floor, whut Ah jes' scrubbed tell yo' marstah kin eat of'n et?" She broke off to listen to Uncle Jefferson's voice outside, directed toward the upper window.

"Dat yo', suh? Yas, suh, dis me. Well, suh, Ah take ol' Sukey out de Red Road, en Ah hitch huh ter yo' machine-thing, en she done balk. Won't go nohow . . . whut, suh? 'Beat huh ovah de haid?' Yas, suh, done hit huh in de haid six times

wid de whip-han'l, en she look me in de eye en ain' said er word. . . . 'Twis' huh tail?' *Me,* suh? No-suh-ree, suh. Mars' Quarles' boy one time he twis' huh tail en dey sen' him ter de horspit'l. 'Daid,' suh? No, suh, ain' daid, but et mos' bust him wide open. . . . 'Set fiah undah huh?' Yas, suh, done set fiah undah huh. Mos' burn up de harness, en ain' done no good. . . . Well, suh, Ah jes' gwineter say no use waitin' fo' Sukey ter change huh min', so Ah put some fence-rails undah huh en jock huh up en come home. En Ah's gwine out arter suppah en Sukey be all right den, suh, Ah reck'n. Yas, suh."

Aunt Daphne plunged out with fire in her eye, but the laugh that came from above was reassuring. "Never mind, Uncle Jefferson, Miss Sukey's whims shall be regarded."

Chum, bouncing up the stairs like an animated bundle of springs, met his master coming down. "Old man," said the latter, "I don't mind telling you that I'm beginning to be taken with this place. But it's in a bad way, and it's going to be put in shape. It's a large order, and we'll have to work like horses. Don't you bother Aunt Daph! You just come with your Uncle Dudley. He's going to take a look over the grounds."

He went to his trunk and fished out a soft shirt on which he knotted a loose tie, exchanged his Panama for a slouch hat, and whistling the bar-

carole from *Tales of Hoffmann,* went gaily out. "I feel tremendously alive to-day," he confided to the dog, as he tramped through the lush grass. "If you see me ladle the muck out of that fountain with my own fair hands, don't have a fit. I'm liable to do anything."

His eye swept up and down the slope. "There probably isn't a finer site for a house in the whole South," he told himself. "The living-rooms front south and west. We'll get scrumptious sunsets from that back porch. And on the other side there's the view clear to the Blue Ridge. And as for this garden, no landscape artist need apply. The outlines are all here; it needs only to be put back. We'll first rake out the rubbish, chop down that underbrush and trim the box. The shrubs only want pruning. Then we'll mend the pool and set the fountain going and put in some goldfish. Flower-seeds and bulbs are cheap enough, I fancy. Just think of a bed of black and gold pansies running down to the lake! And on the other side a wilderness garden. I've seen pictures of them in the illustrated weeklies. Those rotten posts, under that snarl of vines, were a pergola. Any old carpenter can rebuild that — I can draw the plans myself."

He skirted the lake. "Only to grub out some of the lilies — there's too many of them — and straighten the rim — and weed the pebble margin

to give those green rocks a show. I'll build a little wharf below them to dive from, and — yes, I'll stock it with spotted trout. Not just to yank out with a barbed hook, but to make it inhabited. How well a couple of white swans would look preening in the shade out there! The roof's gone from that oval summer-house, but it's no trick to put another on."

He penetrated farther into the tangle and came out into a partially cleared space shaded with great trees, where the grass was matted with clover into a thick rug, sprinkled with designs worked in blue-bells and field-daisies, with here and there a flaunting poppy, like a scarlet medallion. He was but a few hundred yards from the house, yet the silence was so deep that there might have been no habitation within fifty miles. All at once he stopped short; there was a sudden movement in the thicket beyond — the sound of light fast footfalls, as of some one running away.

He made a lunge for the dog, but with a growl Chum tore himself from the restraining grasp and dashed into the bushes. "A child, no doubt," he thought as he plunged in pursuit, "and that lubberly brute will scare it half to death!"

He pulled up with an exclamation. In a narrow wood-path a little way from him, partly hidden by a windfall, stood a girl, her skirt transfixed with a wickedly jagged sapling. He saw instantly how it

had happened; the windfall had blocked the way, and she had sprung clean over it, not noting the screened spear, which now held her as effectually as any railroad spike. She was struggling with silent helpless fury to release herself, wrenching viciously at the offending stuff, which seemed ridiculously stout, and disregarding utterly the bulldog, frisking madly about her feet with sharp joyous barks.

In another moment Valiant had reached her and met her face, flushed, half defiant, her eyes a blue gleam of smoldering anger as she desperately, almost savagely, thrust wild tendrils of flame-colored hair beneath the broad curved brim of her straw hat. At her feet lay a great armful of cape jessamines.

A little thrill, light and warm and joyous, ran through him. Until that instant he had not recognized her.

CHAPTER XVIII

JOHN VALIANT MAKES A DISCOVERY

"I'M so sorry," was what he said, as he kneeled to release her, and she was grateful that his tone was unmixed with amusement. She bit her lips, as by sheer strength of elbow and knee he snapped the offending bole short off — one of those quick exhibitions of reserved strength that every woman likes. Meanwhile he was uttering banal fragments of sentences: "I hope you're not hurt. It was that unmannerly dog, I suppose. What a sword-edge that sliver has! A bad tear, I'm afraid. There! — now it's all right."

"I don't know how I could have been so silly — thank you so much," said Shirley, panting slightly from her exertions. "I'm not the least bit hurt — only my dress — and you know very well that I wasn't afraid of that ridiculous dog." A richer glow stole to her cheeks as she spoke, a burning recollection of a rose, which from her horse that morning at Damory Court, she had glimpsed in its glass on the porch.

Both laughed a little. He imagined that he could smell that wonderful hair, a subtle fragrance like

that of sun-dried seaweed or the elusive scent that clings to a tuft of long-plucked Spanish moss. "Chum stands absolved, then," he said, bending to sweep together the scattered jessamine. "Do you — do you run like that when you're *not* frightened?"

"When I'm caught red-handed. Don't you?"

He looked puzzled.

She pointed to the flowers. "I had stolen them, and I was trying to 'scape off wid 'em' as the negroes say. Shocking, isn't it? But you see, nobody has lived here since long before I was born, and I suppose the flower-thieving habit has become ingrown."

"But," he interrupted, "there's acres of them going to waste. Why on earth shouldn't you have them?"

"Of course I know better to-day, but there was a — a special reason. We have none and this is the nearest place where they grow. My mother wanted some for this particular day."

"Good heavens!" he cried. "You don't think you can't go right on taking them? Why, you can 'scape off' with the whole garden any time!"

A droll little gleam of azure mischief darted at him suddenly out of her eyes and then dodged back again. "Aren't you just a little rash with other people's property?"

"Other people's?"

"What will the owner say?"

He bent back one of the long jessamine stems and wound it around the others. "I can answer for him. Besides, I owe you something, you know. I robbed you this morning — of your brush."

She looked at him, abruptly serious. "Why did you do that?"

"Sanctuary. His two beady eyes begged so hard for it. 'Twenty ravenous hounds,' they said, 'and a dozen galloping horses. And look what a poor shivering little red-brown morsel *I* am!'"

For just an instant the bronze-gold head gave a quick imperious toss, like a high-mettled pony under the flick of the whip. But as suddenly the shadow of resentment passed; the mobile face under the bent hat-brim turned thoughtful. "Poor little beastie!" she said meditatively. "We so seldom think of his side, do we! We think only of the run, the dog-music, the wild rush along the wet fields, with the horses straining and pounding under us. I've ridden to hounds all my life. Everybody does down here." She looked again at him. "Do you think it's wrong to kill things?" she asked gravely.

"Oh, dear, no," he smiled. "I haven't a single *ism*. I'm not even a vegetarian."

"But you would be if you had to kill your own meat?"

"Perhaps. So many of us would. As a matter

of fact, I don't hunt myself, but I'm no reformer."

"Why don't you hunt?"

"I don't enjoy it." He flushed slightly. "I hate firearms," he said, a trifle difficultly. "I always have. I don't know why. Idiosyncrasy, I suppose. But I shouldn't care for hunting, even with bows and arrows. I would kill a tiger or a poisonous reptile, or anything else, in case of necessity. But even then I should hardly enjoy it. I know some animals are pests and have to be killed. Some men do, too. But I don't like to do it myself."

"Wouldn't that theory lead to a wholesale evasion of responsibility?"

"Perhaps. I'm no philosopher. But a blackbird or a red fox is so pretty, even when he is thieving, that I'd let him have the corn. I'm like the Lord High Executioner in *The Mikado* who was so tender-hearted that he couldn't execute anybody and planned to begin with guinea-pigs and work up. Only I'm afraid I couldn't even manage the guinea-pigs."

She laughed. "You wouldn't find many to practise on here. Do you raise guinea-pigs up North?"

"Ah," he said ruefully, "you tag me, too. Have I by chance a large letter N tattooed upon my manly brow? But I suppose it's the accent. Uncle Jefferson catalogued me in five minutes. He said

he didn't know *why* I was from 'de Norf,' but he '*knowed*' it. I've annexed him and his wife, by the way."

"You're lucky to have them. Unc' Jefferson and Aunt Daph might have slipped out of a plantation of the last century. They're absolutely antebellum. Most of the negroes are more or less spoiled, as you'll find, I'm afraid." She turned the conversation bluntly. "Had you seen Damory Court before?"

"No, never."

"Do you like the general plan of the place?"

"Do I like it?" cried John Valiant. "Do I *like* it!"

A quick pleasure glanced across her face. "It's nice of you to say it that way. We ask that question so often it's become mechanical. You see, it's our great show-place. We exhibit it to strangers as we show them the Natural Bridge and Monticello, and expect them to rhapsodize. Years ago the negroes would never set foot here. The house was supposed to be haunted."

"I'm not afraid," he laughed. "I wouldn't blame any ghost for hanging around. I'm thinking of haunting it myself in a hundred years or so."

"Oh, the specters are all laid long ago, if there ever were any."

At that moment a patter of footsteps and shrill shrieks came flying over the last-year's leaves be-

yond the lilac bushes. "It's Rickey Snyder," she said, peering out smilingly as two children, pursued and pursuer, burst into view. "Hush!" she whispered; "I wonder what they are up to."

The pair came in a whirl through the bushes. The foremost was a seven-year-old negro girl, in a single short cottonade garment, wizened, barelegged and bareheaded, her black wool parted in little angular patches and tightly wrapped with bits of cord. The other was white and as freckled as a turkey's egg, with hair cropped like a boy's. She held a carving-knife cut from a shingle, whose edge had been deeply ensanguined by poke-berry juice. The pursued one stumbled over a root and came to earth in a heap, while the other pounced upon her like a wildcat.

"Hold still, you limb of Satan," she scolded. "How can I do it when you won't stay still?"

"Oh, lawd," moaned the prostrate one, in simulated terror; "oh, Doctah, good Doctah Snydah, has Ah *gotter* hab dat operation? Is yo' sho' gwineter twitter eroun' mah insides wid dem knives en saws en things?"

"It won't hurt," reassured the would-be operator; "no more than it did Mis' Poly Gifford. And I'll put your liver right back again."

"Wait er minute. Ah jes' remembahs Ah fo'got ter make mah will. Ah leabs —"

"Nonsense!" objected the other irritably.

"You made it yesterday. They always do it beforehand."

"No, suh; Ah done clean fergot et. Ah leabs mah thimble ter de Mefodis' church, en mah black en w'ite kitten ter Rickey Snydah, en —"

"I don't want your old tabby!" said the beneficiary unfeelingly. "Now flatten out, while I give you the chloroform."

"All right, Doctah. Ah's in de free-ward en 'tain't costin' me er cent! But Ah's mighty skeered Ah gwineter wake up daid! Gord A'mighty, ef Ah dies, save mah sinful soul! Oh, Mars' Judge Jesus, swing dat cha'yut down en kyah me up ter Hebben! Rickey, yo' reck'n, arter all, Ah's gwineter be er *black* angel? Hesh-sh! Ah's driftin' away, Doctah, Ah's driftin' away on de big wide ribber."

"Now you're asleep," declared the surgeon, and fell to with a flourish of the gory blade.

The other reared herself. "Huh! How yo' reck'n Ah's gwineter be ersleep wid yo' chunkin' me in de shoht-ribs wid dat ar stick? Ain' yo' done cyarvin' me up yet?"

"Oh, nurse," wailed Rickey, turning the drama into a new channel, "I can't wake Greenie up! She won't come out of the chloroform! She's dying. Let's all sing and maybe it'll make it easier:

> "'I went down to Jordan and what did I see,
> Coming for to carry me home?

A band of angels waiting for me,
Coming for to carry me home!'"

The melody, however, was too much for the prospective corpse. She sat up, shook the dead leaves from her hair and joined in, swaying her lean body to and fro and clapping her yellow-lined hands together in an ecstasy:

"'Sweeng low! Sweet Char-ee-yut!
Comin' fo' t'kyah me ho-o-o-ome.
Swee-eng low, swee-et Char-ee-yut!
Comin' fo' t'kyah me home!'"

The two were a strange contrast as they sang, the negro child swaying with the emotionalism of her race and her voice dropping instinctively to a soft alto accompaniment to the other's rigid soprano, and lending itself to subtle half-tones and minor cadences.

A twig snapped under Valiant's foot. The singers faced about and saw them. Both scrambled to their feet, the black girl to look at them with a wide self-conscious grin. Rickey, tossing her short hair back from her freckled face, came toward them.

"My goodness, Miss Shirley," she said, "we didn't see you at all." She looked at Valiant. "Are you the man that's going to fix up Damory Court?" she inquired, without any tedious formalities.

"Yes," said Valiant.

"Well," she said critically, "you've got your job cut out for you. But I should say you're the kind to do it."

"Rickey!" Shirley's voice tried to be stern, but there was a hint of laughter in it.

"What did I say now?" inquired Rickey. "I'm sure I meant it to be complimentary."

"It was," said Valiant. "I shall try to deserve your good opinion."

"But what a ghastly play!" exclaimed Shirley. "Where did you learn it?"

"We were playing Mis' Poly Gifford in the hospital," Rickey answered. "She's got a whole lot of little pebbles that they cut out —"

"Oh, Rickey!" expostulated Shirley with a shudder.

"They *did*. She keeps them in a little pasteboard box like wedding-cake, with a blue ribbon around it. She was showing it to Miss Mattie Sue yesterday. She was telling her all about it. She said all the women there showed each other their cuts and bragged about how long they were."

Valiant's merriment rang out under the trees, but Shirley was crimson. "Well, I don't think it's a nice play," she said decidedly.

"That's just the way," murmured Rickey disconsolately, "yesterday it was *Romeo and Juliet* with

the Meredith children, and their mother had a conniption fit."

"Was that gruesome, too?"

"Not so very. I only poisoned Rosebud and June and stabbed myself. I don't call *that* gruesome."

"You certainly have a highly developed taste for the dramatic," said Shirley. "I wonder what your next effort will be."

"It's to-morrow," Rickey informed her. "We're going to have the duel between Valiant and Sassoon."

The smile was stricken from John Valiant's face. A duel — *the* duel — between Valiant and Sassoon! He felt his blood beat quickly. Had there been such a thing in his father's life? Was that what had blighted it?

"Only not here where it really happened, but in the Meredith orchard. Greenie's going to be —"

"Ah ain'!" contradicted Greenie. "Ah ain' gwineter be dat Valiant, nohow!"

"You are, too!" insisted Rickey wrathfully. "You needn't be so pickety and choosety — and after she kills Sassoon, we put the bloodhounds on her trail."

Greenie tittered. "Dey ain' no dawg eroun' heah'd tech *me,*" she said, "en 'sides —"

"But, Rickey," Shirley interposed, "that wasn't

a murder. That was a duel between gentlemen. They don't —"

"I know it," assented Rickey cheerfully. "But it makes it more exciting. *Will* you come, Miss Shirley, deed and double? I won't charge you any admission."

"I can't promise," said Shirley. "I might stand the duel, but I'm afraid the hounds would be too blood-curdling. By the way," she added, "isn't it about time Miss Mattie Sue had her tea?"

"It certainly is, Miss Shirley!" said Rickey, with penitent emphasis. "I clean forgot it, and she'll row me up the gump-stump! Come on, Greenie," and she started off through the bushes.

But the other hung back. "Ah done tole yo' Ah ain' gwine be dat Valiant," she said stubbornly.

"Look here, Greenville Female Seminary Simms," Rickey retorted, "don't you multiply words with me just because your mammy was working there when you were born and gave you a fancy name! If you'll promise to be him, I'll get Miss Mattie Sue to let us make molasses candy."

CHAPTER XIX

UNDER THE HEMLOCKS

SHIRLEY looked at Valiant with a deepening of her dimple. "Rickey isn't an aristocrat," she said: "she's what we call here poor-white, but she's got a heart of gold. She's an orphan, and the neighborhood in general, and Miss Mattie Sue Mabry in particular, have adopted her."

He hardly heard her words for the painful wonder that was holding him. He had canvassed many theories to explain his father's letter but such a thing as a duel he had never remotely imagined. His father had taken a man's life. Was it this thought — whatever the provocation, however justified by the customs of the time and section — that had driven him to self-exile? He recalled himself with an effort, for she was speaking again.

"You've found Lovers' Leap, no doubt?"

"No. This is the first time I've been so far from the house. Is it near here?"

"I'll show it to you." She held out her hand for the bunch of jessamine and laid it on the broad roots of a tree that were mottled with lichen.

"Look there," she said suddenly; "isn't that a beauty?"

She was pointing to a jimson-weed on which had settled, with glassy wings vibrating, a long, ungainly, needlelike insect with an odd sword-like beak. "What is that?" he asked.

"A snake-doctor. If Unc' Jefferson were here he'd say, 'Bettah watch out! Dah's er snek roun' erbout heah, sho'!' He'll fill you full of darky superstitions."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm being introduced to them hourly. I've met the graveyard rabbit — one of them had hoodooed my motor yesterday. I'm to carry a buckeye in my pocket — by the way, is a buckeye a horse-chestnut? — if I want to escape rheumatism. I've learned that it's bad luck to make a bargain on a Friday, and the weepy consequences of singing before breakfast." A blue-jay darted by them, to perch on a limb and eye them saucily. "And the jay-bird! He goes to hell every Friday noon to carry brimstone and tell the devil what folks have been up to."

She clapped her hands. "You're certainly learning fast. When I was little I used to be delighted to see a blue-jay in the cedars on Friday afternoon. It was a sign we'd been so good there was nothing to tell. Follow me now and I'll show you the view from Lovers' Leap. But look down. Don't lift your eyes till I tell you."

He dropped his gaze to the small brown boots and followed, his eyes catching low side-glimpses of woodsy things — the spangled dance of leaf-shadows, a chameleon lizard whisking through the roots of the bracken, the creamy wavering wings of a white moth resting on a dead stump. Suddenly the slim path between the trees took a quick turn, and fell away at their feet. "There," she said. "This is the finest view at Damory Court."

They stood on the edge of a stony ravine which widened at one end to a shallow marshy valley. The rocks were covered with gray-green feathery creepers, enwound with curly yellow tendrils of love-vine. Across the ravine, on a lower level, began a grove of splendid trees that marched up into the long stretch of neglected forest he had seen from the house. Looking down the valley, fields of young tobacco lay tier on tier, and beyond, in the very middle of the mellow vaporous distance, lifted the tapering tower of a far-off church, hazily outlined against the azure.

"You love it?" he asked, without withdrawing his eyes.

"I've loved it all my life. I love everything about Damory Court. Ruined as it is, it is still one of the most beautiful estates in all Virginia. There's nothing finer even in Italy. Just behind us, where those hemlocks stand, is where the duel the children spoke of was fought."

He turned his head. "Tell me about it," he said.

She glanced at him curiously. "Didn't you know? That was the reason the place was abandoned. Valiant, who lived here, and the owner of another plantation, who was named Sassoon, quarreled. They fought, the story is, under those big hemlock trees. Sassoon was killed."

He looked out across the distance; he could not trust his face. "And — Valiant?"

"He went away the same day and never came back; he lived in New York till he died. He was the father of the Court's present owner. You never heard the story?"

"No," he admitted. "I — till quite recently I never heard of Damory Court."

"As a little girl," she went on, "I had a very vivid imagination, and when I came here to play I used to imagine I could see them, Valiant so handsome — his nickname was Beauty Valiant — and Sassoon. How awful to come to such a lovely spot, just because of a young man's quarrel, and to — to kill one's friend! I used to wonder if the sky was blue that day and whether poor Sassoon looked up at it when he took his place; and whom else he thought of that last moment."

"Had he parents?"

"No, neither of them had, I believe. But there might have been some one else,— some one he cared for and who cared for him. That was the last duel

ever fought in Virginia. Dueling was a dreadful custom. I'm glad it's gone. Aren't you?"

"Yes," he said slowly, "it was a thing that cut two ways. Perhaps Valiant, if he could have had his choice afterward, would rather have been lying there that morning than Sassoon."

"He must have suffered, too," she agreed, "or he wouldn't have exiled himself as he did. I used to wonder if it was a love-quarrel — whether they could have been in love with the same woman."

"But why should he go away?"

"I can't imagine, unless she had really loved the other man. If so, she couldn't have borne seeing Valiant afterward." She paused with a little laugh. "But then," she said, "it may have been nothing so romantic. Perhaps they quarreled over cards or differed as to whose horse was the better jumper. Valiant's grandfather, who was known as Devil-John, is said to have called a man out because he rode past him on the wrong side. Our ancestors in Virginia, I'm afraid, didn't stand on ceremony when they felt uppish."

He did not smile. He was looking out once more over the luminous stretch of fields, his side-face toward her. Curious and painful questions were running through his brain. With an effort, he thrust these back and recalled his attention to what she was saying.

"You wonder, I suppose, that we feel as we

do toward these old estates, and set store by them, and — yes, and brag of them insufferably as we do. But it's in our blood. We love them as the English do their ancient manors. They have made our legends and our history. And the history of Virginia —"

She broke off with a shrug and, more himself now, he finished for her: "— isn't exactly a trifling part of the history of these United States. You are right."

"You Northerners think we are desperately conceited," she smiled, "but it's true. We're still as proud of our land, and its old, old places, and love them as well as our ancestors ever did. We wouldn't change a line of their stately old pillars or a pebble of their darling homey gardens. Do you wonder we resent their passing to people who don't care for them in the Southern way?"

"But suppose the newcomers *do* care for them?"

Her lips curled. "A young millionaire who has lived all his life in New York, to care for Damory Court! A youth idiotically rich, brought up in a superheated atmosphere of noise and money!"

He started uncontrollably. So that was what she thought! He felt himself flushing. He had wondered what would be his impression of the neighborhood and its people; their possible opinion of himself had never occurred to him.

"Why," she went on, "he's never cared enough

about the place even to come and see it. For reasons of his own — good enough ones, perhaps, according to the papers,— he finds himself tired of the city. I can imagine him reflecting." With a mocking simulation of a brown-study, she put her hand to her brow, pushing impatiently back the wayward luster: "'Let me see. Don't I own an estate somewhere in the South? Ah-ha! yes. If I remember, it's in Virginia. I'll send down and fix up the old hovel.' Then he telephones for his architect to run down and see what 'improvements' it needs. And — here you are!"

He laughed shortly — a tribute to her mimicry — but it was a difficult laugh. The desperately ennuyée pose, the lax drawl, the unaccustomed mental effort and the sudden self-congratulatory "ah-ha!" — hitting off to a hair the lackadaisical boredom of the haplessly rich young boulevardier — this was the countryside's pen-picture of *him!*

"Don't you consider a longing for nature a wholesome sign?"

"Perhaps. The vagaries of the rich are always suggestive."

"You think there's no chance of his choosing to stay here because he actually likes it?"

"Not the slightest," she said indifferently.

"You are so certain of this without ever having seen him?"

She glanced at him covertly, annoyedly sensible

of the impropriety of the discussion, since the man discussed was certainly his patron, maybe his friend. But his insistence had roused a certain balky wilfulness that would have its way. "It's true I've never seen him," she said, "but I've read about him a hundred times in the Sunday supplements. He's a regular feature of the high-roller section. His idea of a good time is a dog-banquet at Sherry's. Why, a girl told me once that there was a cigarette named after him — the Vanity Valiant!"

An angry glint slanted across his eyes. For some reason the silly story on her lips stung him deeply. "You find the Sunday newspapers always so dependable?"

"Well," she flashed, "you must know Mr. Valiant. *Is* he a useful citizen? What has he ever done except play polo and furnish spicy paragraphs for the society columns?"

"Isn't that beside the point? Because he has been an idler, must he necessarily be a — vandal?"

She laughed again. "*He* wouldn't call it vandalism. He'd think it decided improvement to make Damory Court as frantically different as possible. I suppose he'll erect a glass cupola and a porte-cochère, all up-to-date and varnishy, and put orchid hot-houses where the wilderness garden was, and a modern marble cupid instead of the summer-house, and lay out a kite-shaped track —"

Everything that was impulsive and explosive in John Valiant's nature came out with a bang. "No!" he cried, "whatever else he is, he's not such a preposterous ass as that!"

She faced him squarely now. Her eyes were sparkling. "Since you know him so intimately and so highly approve of him —"

"No, no," he interrupted. "You mistake me. I shouldn't try to justify him." His flush had risen to the roots of his brown hair, but he did not lower his gaze. Now the red color slowly ebbed, leaving him pale. "He *has* been an idler — that's true enough — and till a week ago he was 'idiotically rich.' But his idling is over now. At this moment, except for this one property, he is little better than a beggar."

She had taken a hasty step or two back from him, and her eyes were now fixed on his with a dawning half-fearful question in them.

"Till the failure of the Valiant Corporation, he had never heard of Damory Court, much less been aware that he owned it. It wasn't because he loved it that he came here — no! How could it be? He had never set foot in Virginia in his mortal life."

She put up her hands to her throat with a start. "Came?" she echoed. "*Came!*"

"But if you think that even he could be so crassly stupid, so monumentally blind to all that is really fine and beautiful —"

"Oh!" she cried with flashing comprehension. "Oh, how could you! You —"

He nodded curtly. "Yes," he said. "I am that haphazard harlequin, John Valiant, himself."

CHAPTER XX

ON THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

THERE was a pause not to be reckoned by minutes but suffocatingly long. She had grown as pale as he.

"That was ungenerous of you," she said then with icy slowness. "Though no doubt you — found it entertaining. It must have still further amused you to be taken for an architect?"

"I am flattered," he replied, with a trace of bitterness, "to have suggested, even for a moment, so worthy a calling."

Though he spoke calmly enough, his thoughts were in ragged confusion. As her gaze dived into his, he was conscious of outré fancies. She seemed to him like some snow-cloud in woman's shape, edged with anger and swept by a wrathful wind into this summery afternoon. For her part she was telling herself with passionate resentment that he had no right so to misrepresent himself — to lead her on to such a dénouement. At his answer she put out her hand with a sudden gesture, as if bluntly thrusting the matter from her concern, and turning, went back along the tree-shadowed path.

He followed glumly, gnawing his lip, wanting to say he knew not what, but wretchedly tongue-tied, noting that the great white moth was still waving its creamy wings on the dead stump and wondering if she would take the cape jessamines. He felt an embarrassed relief when, passing the roots where they lay, she stooped to raise them.

Then all at once the blood seemed to shrink from his heart. With a hoarse cry he leaped toward her, seized her wrist and roughly dragged her back, feeling as he did so, a sharp fiery sting on his instep. The next moment, with clenched teeth, he was viciously stamping his heel again and again, driving into the soft earth a twisting root-like something that slapped the brown wintered leaves into a hissing turmoil.

He had flung her from him with such violence that she had fallen sidewise. Now she raised herself, kneeling in the feathery light, both hands clasped close to her breast, trembling excessively with loathing and feeling the dun earth-floor billow like a canvas sea in a theater. Little puffs of dust from the protesting ground were wreathing about her set face, and she pressed one hand against her shoulder to repress her shivers.

"The horrible — horrible — thing!" she said whisperingly. "It would have bitten me!"

He came toward her, panting, and grasping her hand, lifted her to her feet. He staggered slightly

as he did so, and she saw his lips twist together oddly. "Ah," she gasped, "it bit you! It bit you!"

"No," he said, "I think not."

"Look! There on your ankle — that spot!"

"I did feel something, just that first moment." He laughed uncertainly. "It's queer. My foot's gone fast asleep."

Every remnant of color left her face. She had known a negro child who had died of a water-moccasin's bite some years before — the child of a house-servant. It had been wading in the creek in the gorge. The doctor had said then that if one of the other children. . . .

She grasped his arm. "Sit down," she commanded, "here, on this log, and see."

Her pale fright caught him. He obeyed, dragged off the low shoe and bared the tingling spot. The firm white flesh was puffing up around two tiny blue-rimmed punctures. He reached into his pocket, then remembered that he had no knife. As a next best thing he knotted his handkerchief quickly above the ankle, thrust a stick through the loop and twisted it till the ligature cut deeply, while she knelt beside him, her lips moving soundlessly, saying over and over to herself words like these: "I must not be frightened. He doesn't realize the danger, but I do! I must be quite collected. It is a mile to the doctor's. I might run to the house

and send Unc' Jefferson, but it would take too long. Besides, the doctor might not be there. There is no one to do anything but me."

She crouched beside him, putting her hands by his on the stick and wrenching it over with all her strength. "Tighter, tighter," she said. "It must be tighter." But, to her dismay, at the last turn the improvised cord snapped, and the released stick flew a dozen feet away.

Her heart leaped chokingly, then dropped into hammer-like thudding. He leaned back on one arm, trying to laugh, but she noted that his breath came shortly as if he had been running. "Absurd!" he said, frowning. "How such — a fool thing — can hurt!"

Suddenly she threw herself on the ground and grasped his foot with both her hands. He could see her face twitch with shuddering, and her eyes dilating with some determined purpose.

"What are you going to do?"

"This," she said, and he felt her shrinking lips, warm and tremulous, pressed hard against his instep.

He drew away sharply, with savage denial. "No — no! Not that! You shan't! My lord — you shan't!" He dragged his numbing foot from her desperate grasp, lifting himself, pushing her from him; but she fought with him, clinging, panting broken sentences:

"You must! It's the only way. It was — a moccasin, and it's deadly. Every minute counts!"

"I won't. No, stop! How do you know? It's not going to — here, listen! Take your hands away. Listen! — *Listen!* I can go to the house and send Uncle Jefferson for the doctor and he — No! stop, I say! Oh — I'm sorry if I hurt you. How strong you are!"

"Let me!"

"No! Your lips are not for that — good God, that damnable thing! You yourself might be —"

"Let me! Oh, how cruel you are! It was my fault. But for me it would never have —"

"No! I would rather —"

"*Let me!* Oh, if you *died!*"

With all the force of her strong young body she wrenched away his protestant hands. A thirst and a sickish feeling were upon him, a curious irresponsible giddiness, and her hair which that struggle had brought in tumbled masses about her shoulders, seemed to have little flames running all over it. His foot had entirely lost its feeling. There was a strange weakness in his limbs.

He felt it with a cool thriving surprise. Could it be death stealing over him — really death, in this silly inglorious guise, from a miserable crawling reptile? Death, when he had just begun a life that seemed so worth living?

A sense of unreality came. He was asleep! The

failure, the investigation, Virginia — all was a dream. Presently he would wake in his bachelor quarters to find his man setting out his coffee and grapefruit. He settled back and closed his eyes.

Moments of half-consciousness, or consciousness jumbled with strange imaginings, followed. At times he felt the pressure upon the wounded foot, was sensible of the suction of the young mouth striving desperately to draw the poison from the wound. From time to time he was conscious of a white desperate face haloed with hair that was a mist of woven sparkles. At times he thought himself a recumbent stone statue in a wood, and her a great tall golden-headed flower lying broken at his feet. Again he was a granite boulder and she a vine with yellow leaves winding and clinging about him. Then a blank — a sense of movement and of troublous disturbance, of insistent voices that called to him and inquisitive hands that plucked at him, and then voices growing distant again, and hands falling away, and at last — silence.

CHAPTER XXI

AFTER THE STORM

INKY clouds were gathering over the sunlight when Shirley came from Damory Court, along the narrow wood-path under the hemlocks, and the way was striped with blue-black shadows and filled with sighing noises. She walked warily, halting often at some leafy rustle to catch a quick breath of dread. As she approached the tree-roots where the cape jessamines lay, she had to force her feet forward by sheer effort of will. At a little distance from them she broke a stick and with it managed to drag the bunch to her, turning her eyes with a shiver from the trampled spot near by. She picked up the flowers, and treading with caution, retraced her steps to the wider path.

She stepped into the Red Road at length in the teeth of a thunder-storm, which had arisen almost without warning to break with the passionate intensity of electric storms in the South. The green-golden fields were now a gray seethe of rain and the farther peaks lifted like huge tumbled masses of onyx against a sky stippled with wan yellow and vicious violet. The wind leaped and roared and

swished through the weeping foliage, lashing the dull Pompeian-red puddles, swirling leaves and twigs from the hedges and seeming to be intent on dragging her very garments from her as she ran.

There was no shelter, but even had there been, she would not have sought it. The turbulence of nature around her matched, in a way, her overstrained feeling, and she welcomed the fierce bulge of the wind in the up-blowing whorls of her hair and the drenching wetness of the rain. At length, out of breath, she crouched down under a catalpa tree, watching the fangs of lightning knot themselves against the baleful gray-yellow dimness, making sudden flares of unbearable brightness against which twigs etched themselves with the unrelieved sharpness of black paper silhouettes.

She tried to fix her mind on near things, the bending grasses, the scurrying red runnels and flapping shrubbery, but her thoughts wilfully escaped the tether, turning again and again to the events of the last two hours. She pictured Unc' Jefferson's eyes rolling up in ridiculous alarm, his winnowing arm lashing his indignant mule in his flight for the doctor.

At the mental picture she choked with hysterical laughter, then cringed suddenly against the sopping bark. She saw again the doctor's gaze lift from his first examination of the tiny punctures to send a swift penetrant glance straight at her, before he

bent his great body to carry the unconscious man to the house. Again a fit of shuddering swept over her. Then, all at once, tears came, strangling sobs that bent and swayed her. It was the discharge of the Leyden jar, the loosing of the tense bow-string, and it brought relief.

After a time she grew quieter. He would perhaps still be lying on the couch in the dull-colored library, under the one-eyed portrait, his hair waving crisply against the white blanket, his hands moving restlessly, his lips muttering. Her imagination followed Aunt Daph shuffling to fetch this and that, nagged by the doctor's sharp admonitions.

He would get well! The thought that perhaps she had saved his life gave her a thrill that ran over her whole body. And until yesterday she had never seen him! She kneeled in the blurred half-light, pushing her wet hair back from her forehead and smiling up in the rain that still fell fast.

In a few moments she rose and went on. The lightning came now at longer and more irregular intervals and the thunder pealed less heavily. The wan yellow murk was lifting. Here and there a soaked sun-beam peered half-frightened through the racked mist-wreaths, as though to smell the oversweet fragrance of the wet jessamine in her arms.

At the gate of the Rosewood lane stood a mail-box on a cedar post and she paused to fish out a draggled Richmond newspaper. As she thrust it

under her arm her eye caught a word of a head-line. With a flush she tore it from its soggy wrapper, the wetted fiber parting in her eager fingers, and resting her foot on the lower rail of the gate, spread it open on her knee.

She stood stock-still until she had read the whole. It was the story of John Valiant's sacrifice of his private fortune to save the ruin of the involved Corporation.

Its effect upon her was a shock. She felt her throat swell as she read; then she was chilled by the memory of what she had said to him: "What has he ever done except play polo and furnish spicy paragraphs for the society columns?"

"What a beast I was!" she said, addressing the wet hedge. "He had just done that splendid thing. It was because of that that he was little better than a beggar, and I said those horrible things!" Again she bent her eyes, rereading the sentences: "*Took his detractors by surprise . . . had just sustained a grilling at the hands of the State's examiner which might well have dried at their fount the springs of sympathy.*"

She crushed up the paper in her hand and rested her forehead on the wet rail. Idiotically rich — a vandal — a useless purse-proud *flâneur*. She had called him all that! She could still see the paleness of his look as she had said it.

Shirley, overexcited as she still was, felt the

sobs returning. These, however, did not last long and in a moment she found herself smiling again. Though she had hurt him, she had saved him, too! When she whispered this over to herself it still thrilled and startled her. She folded the paper and hastened on under the cherry-trees.

Emmaline, the negro maid was waiting anxiously on the porch. She was thin to spareness, with a face as brown as a tobacco leaf, restless black eyes and wool neatly pinned and set off by an amber comb.

"Honey," called Emmaline, "I'se been fearin' fo' yo' wid all that lightnin' r'arin' eroun'. Do yo' remembah when yo' useter run up en jump plumb down in th' middle of yore feddah-baid en covah up dat little gol' haid, en I useter tell yo' th' noise was th' Good Man rollin' eroun' his rain-barr'l?" She laughed noiselessly, holding both hands to her thin sides. "Yo' grow'd up now so yo' ain' skeered o' nothin' this side th' Bad Place! Yo' got th' jess'-mine? Give 'em to Em'line. She'll fix 'em all nice, jes' how Mis' Judith like."

"All right, Emmaline," replied Shirley. "And I'll go and dress. Has mother missed me?"

"No'm. She ain' lef' huh room this whole blessed day. Now yo' barth's all ready — all 'cep'n th' hot watah, en I sen' Ranston with that th' fus' thing. Yo' hurry en peel them wet close off yo'se'f, or yo' have one o' them digested chills."

Her young mistress flown and the hot water despatched, the negro woman spread a cloth on the floor and began to cut and dress the long stalks of the flowers. This done she fetched bowls and vases, and set the pearly-white clumps here and there — on the dining-room sideboard, the hall mantel and the desk of the living-room — till the delicate fragrance filled the house, quite vanquishing the rose-scent from the arbors.

When all was done, she stood in the doorway with arms akimbo, turning about to survey her handiwork. "Mis' Judith be pleas' with that," she said, nodding her woolly head with vigor. "Wondah why she want them sprangly things! All th' res' o' th' time roses, but 'bout onct a yeah seems like she jes' got to have them jess'mine en nothin' else."

She swept up the scattered twigs and leaves, and going into the dining-room, began to lay the table for dinner. This room was square and low, with a carved console and straight-backed chairs thinly cushioned in faded blue to match the china. The olive-gray walls were brightened with the soft dull gold of an old mirror and picture frames from which dim faces looked placidly down. The crumbling splendor of the storm-racked sunset fell through old-fashioned leaded window-panes, tinging the white Capodimonte figures on the mantelpiece.

As the trim colored woman moved lightly about in the growing dusk, with the low click of glass and

muffled clash of silver, the light *tat-tat* of a cane sounded, and she ran to the hall, where Mrs. Dandridge was descending the stairway, one slim white hand holding the banister, under the edge of a white silk shawl which drooped its heavy fringes to her daintily-shod feet. On the lower step she halted, looking smilingly about at the blossoming bowls.

"*Don'* they smell up th' whole house?" said Emmaline. "I know'd yo' be pleas', Mis' Judith. Now put yo' han' on mah shouldah en I'll take yo' to yo' big cha'h."

They crossed the hall, the dusky form bending to the fragile pressure of the fingers. "Now heah's yo' cha'h. Ranston he made up a little fiah jes' to take th' damp out, en th' big lamp's lit, en Miss Shirley'll be down right quick."

A moment later, in fact, Shirley descended the stair, in a filmy gown of India-muslin, with a narrow belting of gold, against whose flowing sleeves her bare arms showed with a flushed pinkness the hue of the pale coral beads about her neck. The damp newspaper was in her hand.

At her step her mother turned her head: she was listening intently to voices that came from the garden — a child's shrill treble opposing Ranston's stentorian grumble.

"Listen, Shirley. What's that Rickey is telling Ranston?"

"Don' yo' come heah wid yo' no-count play-actin'. Cyan' fool Ranston wid no sich snek-story, neidah. Ain' no moc'sin at Dam'ry Co'ot, en nebbah *was!*"

"There was, too!" insisted Rickey. "One bit him and Miss Shirley found him and sent Uncle Jefferson for Doctor Southall and it saved his life! So there! Doctor Southall told Mrs. Mason. And he isn't a man who's just come to fix it up, either; he's the really truly man that owns it!"

"Who on earth is that child talking about?"

Shirley put her arm around her mother and kissed her. Her heart was beating quickly. "The owner has come to Damory Court. He—"

The small book Mrs. Dandridge held fell to the floor. "The owner! What owner?"

"Mr. Valiant — Mr. John Valiant. The son of the man who abandoned it so long ago." As she picked up the fallen volume and put it into her mother's hands, Shirley was startled by the whiteness of her face.

"Dearest!" she cried. "You are ill. You shouldn't have come down."

"No. It's nothing. I've been shut up all day. Go and open the other window."

Shirley threw it wide. "Can I get your salts?" she asked anxiously.

Her mother shook her head. "No," she said almost sharply. "There's nothing whatever the mat-

ter with me. Only my nerves aren't what they used to be, I suppose — and snakes always *did* get on them. Now, give me the gist of it first. I can wait for the rest. There's a tenant at Damory Court. And his name's John — Valiant. And he was bitten by a moccasin. When?"

"This afternoon."

Mrs. Dandridge's voice shook. "Will he — will he recover?"

"Oh, yes."

"Beyond any question?"

"The doctor says so."

"And you found him, Shirley — *you?*"

"I was there when it happened." She had crouched down on the rug in her favorite posture, her coppery hair against her mother's knee, catching strange reddish over-tones like molten metal, from the shaded lamp. Mrs. Dandridge fingered her cane nervously. Then she dropped her hand on the girl's head.

"Now," she said, "tell me *all* about it."

CHAPTER XXII

THE ANNIVERSARY

THE story was not a long one, though it omitted nothing: the morning fox-hunt and the identification of the new arrival at Damory Court as the owner of yesterday's stalled motor; the afternoon raid on the jessamine, the conversation with John Valiant in the woods.

Mrs. Dandridge, gazing into the fire, listened without comment, but more than once Shirley saw her hands clasp themselves together and thought, too, that she seemed strangely pale. The swift and tragic sequel to that meeting was the hardest to tell, and as she ended she put up her hand to her shoulder, holding it hard. "It was horrible!" she said. Yet now she did not shudder. Strangely enough, the sense of loathing which had been surging over her at recurrent intervals ever since that hour in the wood, had vanished utterly!

She read the newspaper article aloud and her mother listened with an expression that puzzled her. When she finished, both were silent for a moment, then she asked, "You must have known his father, dearest; didn't you?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Dandridge after a pause. "I — knew his father."

Shirley said no more, and facing each other in the candle-glow, across the spotless damask, they talked, as with common consent, of other things. She thought she had never seen her mother more brilliant. An odd excitement was flooding her cheek with red and she chatted and laughed as she had not done for years. Even Ranston rolled his eyes in appreciation, later confiding to Emmaline in the kitchen that "Mis' Judith cert'n'y chipper ez er squ'rl dis ev'nin'. Reck'n she be breckin' dat cane ovah some o' ouah haids yit! What yo' spos'n she say 'bout dem aryplanes? She 'clah she tickle tuh deff ter ride in one — yas'm. Say et soun' lak er thrash'n-machine en look lak er debble-fish but she don' keer. When *she* ride, she want tuh zip — yas she did! Dat's jes' whut Mis' Judith say."

But after dinner the gaiety and effervescence faded quickly and Mrs. Dandridge went early to her room. She mounted the stair with her arm thrown about Shirley's pliant waist. At the window, where the balustrade turned, she paused to peer into the night. The air outside was moist and heavy with rose-scent.

"How alive they seem, Shirley," she said, "— the roses. But the jessamine deserves its little hour." At her door she kissed her, looking at her with a

strange smile. "How curious," she said, as if to herself, "that it should have happened, to-day!"

The reading-lamp had been lighted on her table. She drew a slim gold chain from the bosom of her dress and held to the light a little locket-brooch it carried. It was of black enamel, with a tiny laurel-wreath of pearls on one side encircling a single diamond. The other side was of crystal and covered a baby's russet-colored curl. In her fingers it opened and disclosed a miniature at which she looked closely for a moment.

As she snapped the halves shut, her eye fell on the open page of a book that lay on the table in the circle of radiance. It was *Lucile:*

"Alas! who shall number the drops of the rain?
Or give to the dead leaves their greenness again?
Who shall seal up the caverns the earthquake hath rent?
Who shall bring forth the winds that within them are pent?
To a voice who shall render an image? or who
From the heats of the noontide shall gather the dew?"

Her eyes turned restlessly about the room. It had been hers as a girl, for Rosewood had been the old Garland homestead. It seemed now all at once to be full of calling memories of her youth. She looked again at the page and turned the leaf:

"Hush! That which is done
I regret not. I breathe no reproaches. That's best
Which God sends. 'Twas His will; it is mine. And the rest
Of that riddle I will not look back to!"

She closed the book hastily and thrust it out of sight, beneath a magazine.

"How strange that it should have been to-day!" It had been on Shirley's lips to question, but the door had closed, and she went slowly down-stairs. She sat a while thinking, but at length grew restless and began to walk to and fro across the floor, her hands clasped behind her head so that the cool air filled her flowing sleeves. In the hall she could hear the leisurely kon-*kon* — kon-*kon* of the tall clock. The evening outside was exquisitely still and the metallic monotone was threaded with the airy *fiddle-fiddle* of crickets in the grass and punctuated with the rain-glad *cloap* of a frog.

Presently, with the mellow whirrings that accompany the movements of such antiques, the ancient timepiece struck ten. At the sound she threw a thin scarf over her shoulders and stole out to the porch. Its deep odorous shadow was crossed by oblongs of lemon-colored light from the windows. Before the kitchen door Ranston's voice was humming huskily:

> "'Steal away; Steal away!
> Steal away to Jesus.
> Steal away! Steal away home—'"

accompanied by the soft alto of Aunt Judy the cook.

Shirley stepped lightly down to the wet grass.

Looking back, she could see her mother's lighted blind. All around the ground was splotched with rose-petals, looking in the squares of light like bloody rain. Beyond the margin of this brightness all was in darkness, for the moon was not yet risen, and a light damp breeze passed in a slow rhythm as if the earth were breathing moistly in its sleep. Somewhere far away sounded the faint inquiring *woo-o-o* of an owl and in the wet branches of a walnut tree a pigeon moved murmurously.

She skimmed the lawn and ran a little way down the lane. A shuffling sound presently fell on her ear.

"Is that you, Unc' Jefferson?" she called softly.

"Yas'm!" The footsteps came nearer. "Et's me, Miss Shirley." He tittered noiselessly, and she could see his bent form vibrating in the gloom. "Yo' reck'n Ah done fergit?"

"No, indeed. I knew you wouldn't do that. How is he?"

"He right much bettah," he replied in the same guarded tone. "Doctah he say he be all right in er few days, on'y he gotter lay up er while. Dat was er ugly nip he got f'om dat 'spisable rep*tyle*. Ah reck'n de moc'sins is wuss'n dem ar Floridy yallar-gaters."

"Do you think there can be any others about the grounds?"

"No'm. Dey mos'ly keeps ter de ma'sh-lan'

en on'y runs whah de undah-bresh ez thick. I gwineter fix dat ter-morrow. Mars' Valiant he tell me ter grub et all out en make er bon-fiah ob it."

"That's right, Unc' Jefferson. Good night, and thank you for coming."

She started back to the house, when his voice stopped her.

"Mis Shirley, yo' don' keer ef de ole man geddahs two er three ob dem roses? Seems lak young mars' moughty fon' ob dem. He got one in er glass but et's mos' daid now."

"Wait a minute," she said, and disappeared in the darkness, returning quickly with a handful which she put in his grasp.

"There!" she whispered, and slipped back through the perfumed dark.

An hour later she stood in the cozy stillness of her bedroom. It was hung in silvery blue with curtains of softly figured shadow-cloth having a misty design of mauve and pink hydrangeas. A tilted mirror on the draped dressing-table had a dark mahogany frame set in upright posts carved in a heavy pattern of grape-leaves. Two candles in silver candlesticks stood before it, their friendly light winking from the fittings of the dark bed, from the polished surface of the desk in the corner and from the old piece of brocade stretched above the mantel, worked like shredded silver cobwebs.

She threw off her gown, slipped into a soft loose robe of maize-colored silk and stood before the small glass. She pulled out the amber pins and drew her wonderful hair on either side of her face, looking out at her reflection like a mermaid from between the rippling waves of a moon-golden sea. She gazed a long critical minute from eyes whose blue seemed now almost black.

At last she turned, and seating herself at the desk, took from it a diary. She scanned the pages at random, her eyes catching lines here and there. "A good run to-day. Betty and Judge Chalmers and the Pendleton boys. My fourth brush this season." A frown drew itself across her brows, and she turned the page. "One of the hounds broke his leg, and I gave him to Rickey." . . . "Chilly Lusk to dinner to-day, after swimming the Loring Rapid."

She bit her lip, turned abruptly to the new page and took up her pen. "This morning a twelve mile run to Damory Court," she wrote. "This afternoon went for cape jessamines." There she paused. The happenings and sensations of that day would not be recorded. They were unwritable.

She laid down her pen and put her forehead on her clasped hands. How empty and inane these entries seemed beside this rich and eventful twenty-four hours just passed! What had she been doing a year ago to-day? she wondered. The lower

drawer of the desk held a number of slim diaries like the one before her. She pulled it out, took up the last-year's volume and opened it.

"Why," she said in surprise, "I got jessamine for mother this very same day last year!" she pondered frowning, then reached for a third and a fourth. From these she looked up, startled. That date in her mother's calendar called for cape jessamines. What was the fourteenth of May to her?

She bent a slow troubled gaze about her. The room had been hers as a child. She seemed suddenly back in that childhood, with her mother bending over her pillow and fondling her rebellious hair. When the wind cried for loneliness out in the dark she had sung old songs to her that had seemed to suit a windy night: *Mary of the Wild Moor,* and *I am Dreaming Now of Hallie.* Sad songs! Even in those pinafore years Shirley had vaguely realized that pain lay behind the brave gay mask. Was there something — some event — that had caused that dull-colored life and unfulfilment? And was to-day, perhaps, its anniversary?

Her thought darted to her father who had died before her birth, on whose gray hair had been set the greenest laurels of the Civil War. She had always been deeply proud of his military record — had never read his name on a page of Confederate history without a new thrill. But she had never thought of him and her mother as actors in a pas-

sionate love-romance. Their portraits hung together in the living-room down-stairs: the grave middle-aged man with graying hair, and the pale proud girl with the strange shadow in the dark eyes. The canvases had been painted in the year of her mother's marriage. The same sadness had been in her face then. And their marriage and his death had both fallen in midwinter. No, this May date was not connected with him!

"Dearest, dearest!" whispered Shirley, and a slow tear drew its shining track down her cheek. "Is there something I've never known? Is there?"

CHAPTER XXIII

UNCLE JEFFERSON'S STORY

JOHN VALIANT sat propped up on the library couch, an open magazine unheeded on his knee. The reading-stand beside him was a litter of letters and papers. The bow-window was open and the honeysuckle breeze blew about him, lifting his hair and ruffling the leaves of the papers. In one corner, in a splotch of bright sunshine, lay the bull-dog, watching a strayed blue-bottle darting in panic hither and thither near the ceiling.

Outside a colored maid — a new acquisition of Aunt Daphne's — named Cassandra, black (in Doctor Southall's phrase) "as the inside of a cow," and dressed in a trim cotton-print "swing-clear," was sweeping the big porch. Over the little cabin by the kitchens, morning-glories twirled their young tendrils. Before its step stood a low shuck-bottom "rocker" with a crimson dyed sheep-skin for upholstery, on which was curled a brindle cat. Through its door Valiant could see a spool what-not, with green pasteboard partitions, a chromo framed in pine-covers on the wall and on a shelf a crêton-covered can full of bustling paper lighters.

In the garden three darkies were laboring, under the supervision of Uncle Jefferson. The unsightly weeds and lichen were gone from the graveled paths, and from the fountain pool, whose shaft now spouted a slender spray shivered by the breeze into a million diamonds, which fell back into the pool with a tintinabulant trickle and drip. The drunken wild grape-vines now trailed with a pruned and sobered luxuriance and the clamor of hammer and saw came from the direction of the lake, where a carpenter refurbished the ruined summer-house.

The master of Damory Court closed the magazine with a sigh. "If I could only do it all at once!" he muttered. "It takes such a confounded time. Four days they've been working now, and they haven't done much more than clean up." He laughed, and threw the magazine at the dog who dodged it with injured alacrity. "After all, Chum," he remarked, "it's been thirty years getting in this condition. I guess we're doing pretty well."

He picked up a plump package and weighed it in his hand. "There are the seeds for the wilderness garden. Bachelor's-buttons and love-lies-bleeding and Jacob's-ladder and touch-me-nots and daffy-down-dillies and phlox and sweet-williams and love-in-a-mist and four-o'clocks — not a blessed hot-house name among 'em, Chum! Don't they sound homey and old-fashioned? The asters and

dahlias and scarlet geraniums are for nearer the house, and the pansies and petunias for that sunny stretch down by the lake. Then there'll be sunflowers around the kitchens and a trumpet-vine over the side of this porch."

He stretched luxuriously. "I'll take a hand at it myself to-morrow. I'm as right as rain again now, thanks to Aunt Daph and the doctor. Something of a crusty citizen, the doctor, but he's all to the good."

A heavy step came along the porch and Uncle Jefferson appeared with a tray holding a covered dish with a plate of biscuit and a round jam-pot. "Look here," said John Valiant, "I had my luncheon three hours ago. I'm being stuffed like a milk-fed turkey."

The old man smiled widely. "Et's jes' er li'l snack er broth," he said. "Reck'n et'll kinder float eroun' de yuddah things. Daph ain' got no use fo' *tea*. She say she boun' ter mek yo' fit fo' ernuddah rassle wid dem moc'sins. Dis' yeah pot's dat apple-buttah whut Miss Mattie Sue sen' yo' by Rickey Snyder."

Valiant sniffed with satisfaction. "I'm getting so confoundedly spoiled," he said, "that I'm tempted to stay sick and do nothing but eat. By the way, Uncle Jefferson, where did Rickey come from? Does she belong here?"

"No, suh. She come f'om Hell's-Half-Acre."

"What's that?"

"Dat's dat ornery passle o' folks yondah on de Dome," explained Uncle Jefferson. "Dey's been dah long's Ah kin recommembah — jes' er ramshackle lot o' shif'less po'-white trash whut git erlong anyways 't all. Ain' nobody boddahs erbout dem 'less'n et's er guv'ment agint, fo' dey makes dey own whisky, en dey drinks et, too."

"That's interesting," said Valiant. "So Rickey belonged there?"

"Yas, suh; nebbah 'd a-come down heah 'cep'in' fo' Miss Shirley. She de one whut fotch de li'l gal outen dat place, en put huh wid Miss Mattie Sue, three yeah ergo."

A sudden color came into John Valiant's cheeks. "Tell me about it." His voice vibrated eagerly.

"Well, suh," continued Uncle Jefferson, "dey was one o' dem low-down Hell's-Half-Acrers, name' Greef King, whut call hese'f de mayah ob de Dome, en he went on de ram*page* one day, en took ahtah his wife. She was er po' sickly 'ooman, wid er li'l gal five yeah ol' by er fust husban'. He done beat huh heap o' times befo', but *dis* time he boun' ter finish huh. Ah reck'n he was too drunk fo' dat, en she got erway en run down heah. Et was wintah time en dah's snow on de groun'. Dah's er road f'om de Dome dat hits de Red Road clost' ter Rosewood — dat ar's de Dandridge place —en she come dah. Reck'n she wuz er pitiful-lookin' obstacle.

'Pcahs lak she done put de li'l gal up in de cabin lof' en hid de laddah, en she mos' crazy fo' feah Greef git huh. She lef' he huntin' fo' de young 'un when she run erway. Dey was on'y Mis' Judith en Miss Shirley en de gal Em'line at Rosewood, 'case Ranston de butlah en de yuddahs gone ter disstracted meetin' down ter de Cullud Mefodis' Chu'ch. Well, suh, dey wa'nt no time ter sen' fo' men. Whut yo' reck'n Miss Shirley do? She ain' afeahd o' nuffin on dis yerf, en she on'y sebenteen yeah ol' den, too. She don' tell Mis' Judith — no, *suh!* She run out ter de stable en saddle huh hoss, en she gallop up dat road ter Hell's-Half-Acre lak er shot outen er shovel."

Valiant brought his hands together sharply. "Yes, yes," he said. "And then?"

"When she come ter Greef King's cabin, he done foun' de laddah, en one er he foots was on de rung. He had er ax in he han'. De po' li'l gal was peepin' down thoo' de cracks o' de flo', en prayin' de bestes' she know how. She say arterwuhds dat she reck'n de Good Lawd sen' er angel, fo' Miss Shirley were all in white — she didn' stop ter change huh close. She didn' say nuffin, Miss Shirley didn'. She on'y lay huh han' on Greef King's ahm, en he look at huh face, en he drop he ax en go. Den she clumb de laddah en fotch de chile down in huh ahms en take huh on de hoss en come back. Dat de way et happen, suh."

"And Rickey was that little child!"

"Yas, suh, she sho' was. In de mawnin' er posse done ride up ter Hell's-Half-Acre en take Greef King in. De majah he argyfy de case fo' de State, en when he done git thoo', dey mos' put de tow eroun' King's nek in de co'ot room. He done got th'ee yeah, en et mos' broke de majah's ha'at dat dey couldn' give him no mo'. He wuz cert'n'y er bad aig, dat Greef wuz. Dey say he done sw'ah he gwineter do up de majah when he git out. De po' 'ooman she stay sick dah at Rosewood all wintah, but she git no bettah moughty fas', en in de spring she up en die. Den Miss Shirley she put li'l Rickey at Miss Mattie Sue's, en she pay fo' huh keep eber sence outer huh own money. Dat whut she done, suh."

Such was the story which Uncle Jefferson told, standing in the doorway. When his shuffling step had retreated, Valiant went to the table and picked up a slim tooled volume that lay there. It was the *Lucile* he had found in the hall the night of his arrival. He opened it to a page where, pressed and wrinkled but still retaining its bright red pigment, lay what had been a rose.

He stood looking at it abstractedly, his nostrils widening to its crushed spicy scent, then closed it and slipped it into his pocket.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN DEVIL-JOHN'S DAY

HE was still sitting motionless when there came a knock at the door and it opened to admit the gruff voice of Doctor Southall. A big form was close behind him.

"Hello. Up, I see. I took the liberty of bringing Major Bristow."

The master of Damory Court came forward — limping the least trifle — and shook hands.

"Glad to know you, sah," said the major. "Allow me to congratulate you; it's not every one who gets bitten by one of those infernal moccasins that lives to talk about it. You must be a pet of Providence, or else you have a cast-iron constitution, sah."

Valiant waved his hand toward the man of medicine, who said, "I reckon Miss Shirley was the Providence in the case. She had sense enough to send for me quick and speed did it."

"Well, sah," the major said, "I reckon under the circumstances, your first impressions of the section aren't anything for us to brag about."

"I'm delighted; it's hard for me to tell how much."

"Wait till you know the fool place," growled the doctor testily. "You'll change your tune."

The major smiled genially. "Don't be taken in by the doctor's pessimism. You'd have to get a yoke of three-year oxen to drag him out of this state."

"It would take as many for me." Valiant laughed a little. "You who have always lived here, can scarcely understand what I am feeling, I imagine. You see, I never knew till quite recently —my childhood was largely spent abroad, and I have no near relatives — that my father was a Virginian and that my ancestors always lived here. To discover this all at once and to come to this house, with their portraits on the walls and their names on the title-pages of these books!" He made a gesture toward the glass shelves. "Why, there's a room up-stairs with the very toys they played with when they were children! To learn that I belong to it all; that I myself am the last link in such a chain!"

"The ancestral instinct," said the doctor. "I'm glad to see that it means something still, in these rotten days."

"Of course," John Valiant continued, "every one knows that he has ancestors. But I'm beginning to see that what you call the ancestral instinct needs

a locality and a place. In a way it seems to me that an old estate like this has a soul too — a sort of clan or family soul that reacts on the descendant."

"Rather a Japanesy idea, isn't it?" observed the major. "But I know what you mean. Maybe that's why old Virginian families hang on to their land in spite of hell and high-water. They count their forebears real live people, quite capable of turning over in their graves."

"Mine are beginning to seem very real to me. Though I don't even know their Christian names yet, I can judge them by their handiwork. The men who built Damory Court had a sense of beauty and of art."

"And their share of deviltry, too," put in the doctor.

"I suppose so," admitted his host. "At this distance I can bear even that. But good or bad, I'm deeply thankful that they chose Virginia. Since I've been laid up, I've been browsing in the library here —"

"A bit out of date now, I reckon," said the major, "but it used to pass muster. Your grandfather was something of a book-worm. He wrote a history of the family, didn't he?"

"Yes. I've found it. *The Valiants of Virginia.* I'm reading the Revolutionary chapters now. It never seemed real before — it's been only

a slice of impersonal and rather dull history. But the book has made it come alive. I'm having the thrill of the globe-trotter the first time he sees the Tower of London or the field of Waterloo. I see more than that stubble-field out yonder; I see a big wooden stockade with soldiers in ragged buff and blue guarding it."

The major nodded, "Ah, yes," he said. "The Continental prison-camp."

"And just over the rise there I can see an old court-house, and the Virginia Assembly boiling under the golden tongue-lashing of lean raw-boned Patrick Henry. I see a messenger gallop up and see the members scramble to their saddles — and then, Tarleton and his red-coats streaming up, too late."

"Well," commented the doctor deliberately, "all I have to say is, don't materialize too much to Mrs. Poly Gifford when you meet her. She'll have you lecturing to the Ladies' Church Guild before you know it. She's sailed herself out here already, I understand."

"She called the second day: my first visitor. I've subscribed to the Guild."

The doctor chuckled. "Blame curiosity! That woman's housemaid-silly. She can spin more street yarn than any ten in the county. Miss Mattie Sue's been here, too, she told me. Ah, yes,"— looking quizzically at the tray —"I recognize the apple-but-

ter. A pot just like that goes to the White House every Christmas there's a Democrat there. She reminds me of a little drab-gray wren in horn-rimmed spectacles."

"She's perfectly dear!" said Valiant, "from her hoops to the calycanthus bud tied in the corner of her handkerchief. She must be very old. She told me she remembered seeing Jefferson at Monticello."

"She's growing younger," the doctor said. "Sixteen or seventeen years ago she was very feeble and the Ladies' Guild agreed to support her for life on consideration that she will her house and lot to the church, next door. Mrs. Poly Gifford refers to her now, I believe, as a dispensation of Providence. Did she bring the apple-butter herself?"

"No," smiled John Valiant. "She sent it afterward by Miss Rickey Snyder."

The major stroked his imperial. "Rickey's an institution," he said. "I hope she gave us all good characters. I'd hate to have Rickey Snyder down on me! Have you heard her history?"

"Yes, Uncle Jefferson told me."

"I'm glad of that," shot out the doctor. "Now, we needn't have it from Bristow. He's as fond of oratory as a maltese cat is of milk."

"He gave me a hint of the major's powers in that direction, in his account of Greef King's trial."

"Humph!" retorted the doctor gloomily, "that was in his palmy days. He's fallen off since then.

Plenty of others been here to bore you, I reckon, though of course you don't remember all the names yet."

Valiant summoned Uncle Jefferson.

"Yas, suh," grinned the old darky pridefully, "de folkses mos' lam de face off'n dat-ar ol' knockah. Day 'fo' yistiddy dah wuz Mars' Quarles en Jedge en Mis' Chalmahs. De jedge done sen' er streng o' silvah perch."

"His place is Gladden Hall," the major said, "one of the finest mansions round here. A sportsman, sah, and one of the best pokah hands in the county."

"— En yistiddy dah's Mars' Chilly Lusk en de Pen'letons en de Byloes en Mars' Livy Stowe f'om Seven Oaks, en de Woodrows en —"

"That'll do," said the major. "I'll just run over the tax-list; it'll be quicker. There are kindly people here, sah," he went on, "but after all, it's a narrow circle. We have our little pleasures and courtships and scandals and we are satisfied with them. We're not gadabouts. Our girls haven't all flirted around Europe and they don't talk of the Pincio and the Champs Elysées as if they were Capitol Hill and Madison Street in Richmond. But if I may say so, sah, I think in Virginia we get a little closer to life as God Almighty intended it than people in some of your big cities."

"Come, Bristow," interrupted the doctor, "tell

the truth. This dog-gone borough is as dull as a mud fence sticking with tadpoles. There isn't a man in it with a soul above horse-flesh."

The doctor's shafts to-day, however, glanced off the major's buckler of geniality like the Lilliputian arrows from Gulliver's eye-glass. "I hope you ride, Mr. Valiant?" the latter asked genially.

"I'm fond of it," said Valiant, "but I have no horse as yet."

"I was thinking," pursued the major, "of the coming tournament."

"Tournament?"

The doctor cut in. "A ridiculous cock-a-doodle-do which gives the young bucks a chance to rig out in silly toggery and prance their colts before a lot of petticoats!"

"It's an annual affair," explained the major; "a kind of spectacle. For many years, by the way, it has been held on a part of this estate — perhaps you will have no objection to its use this season? — and at night there is a dance at the Country Club. By the way, you must let me introduce you there to-morrow. I've taken the liberty already of putting your name up."

"Good lord!" growled the doctor, aside. "He counts himself *young!* If I'd reached your age, Bristow —"

"You have," said the major, nettled. "Four years ago! — As I was saying, Mr. Valiant, they

ride for a prize. It's a very ancient thing — I've seen references to it in a colonial manuscript in the Byrd Library at Westover. No doubt it's come down directly from the old jousts."

"You don't mean to say," cried his hearer in genuine astonishment, "that Virginia has a lineal descendant of the tourney?"

The major nodded. "Yes. Certain sections of Kentucky used to have it, too, but it has died out there. It exists now only in this state. It's a curious thing that the old knightly meetings of the middle ages should survive to-day only on American soil and in a corner of Virginia."

Doctor Southall, meanwhile, had set his gaze on the litter of pamphlets. He turned with an appreciative eye. "You're beginning in earnest. The Agricultural Department. And the Congressional frank."

"I've gone to the fountainhead," said Valiant. "I'm trying to find out possibilities. I've sent samples of the soil. It's lain fallow so long it has occurred to me it may need special treatment."

The major pulled his mustache meditatively. "Not a bad idea," he said. "He's starting right — eh, Southall? You're bringing the view-point of practical science to bear on the problem, Mr. Valiant."

"I'm afraid I'm a sad sketch as a scientist," laughed the other. "My point of view has to be

a somewhat practical one. I must be self-supporting. Damory Court is a big estate. It has grain lands and forest as well. If my ancestors lived from it, I can. It's not only that," he went on more slowly, "I want to make the most of the place for its own sake, too. Not only of its possibilities for earning, but of its natural beauties. I lack the resources I once had, but I can give it thought and work, and if they can bring Damory Court back to anything even remotely resembling what it once was, I'll not spare either."

The major smote his knee and even the doctor's face showed a grim, if transient approval. "I believe you'll do it!" exclaimed the former. "And let me say, sah, that the neighborhood is not unaware of the splendid generosity which is responsible for the present lack of which you speak."

Valiant put out his hand with a little gesture of deprecation, but the other disregarded it. "Confound it, sah, it was to be expected of a Valiant. Your ancestors wrote their names in capital letters over this county. They were an up and down lot, but good or bad (and, as Southall says, I reckon" — he nodded toward the great portrait above the couch —" they weren't all little woolly lambs) they did big things in a big way."

Valiant leaned forward eagerly, a question on his lips. But at the moment a diversion occurred in the shape of Uncle Jefferson, who reentered, bearing

a tray on which sat sundry jugs and clinking glasses, glowing with white and green and gold.

"You old humbug," said the doctor, "don't you know the major's that poisoned with mint-juleps already that he can't get up before eight in the morning?"

"Well, suh," tittered Uncle Jefferson, "Ah done foun' er mint-baid down below de kitchens dis mawnin'. Yo'-all gemmun' 'bout de bigges' expuhts in dis yeah county, en Ah reck'n Mars' Valiant sho' 'sist on yo' samplin' et."

"Sah," said the major feelingly, turning to his host, "I'm proud to drink your health in the typical beverage of Virginia!" He touched glasses with Valiant and glared at the doctor, who was sipping his own thoughtfully. "In my travels," he said, "I have become acquainted with a drink called pousse-café, which contains all the colors of the rainbow. But for chaste beauty, sah, give me this. No garish combination, you will observe. A frosted goblet, golden at the bottom as an autumn corn-ear, shading into emerald and then into snow. On top a white rim of icebergs with the mint sprigs like fairy pine-trees. Poems have been written on the julep, sah."

"They make good epitaphs, too," observed the doctor.

"I notice your glass isn't going begging," the major retorted. "Unc' Jefferson, that's as good

mint as grew in the gyarden of Eden. See that those lazy niggers of yours don't grub the patch out by mistake."

"Yas, *suh,*" said Uncle Jefferson, as he retired with the tray. "Ah gwineter put er fence eroun' dat ar baid 'fo' sundown."

The question that had sprung to Valiant's lips now found utterance. "I saw you look at the portrait there," he said to the major. "Which of my ancestors is it?"

The other got up and stood before the mantelpiece in a Napoleonic attitude. "That," he said, fixing his eye-glasses, "is your great-grandfather, Devil-John Valiant."

"Devil-John!" echoed his host. "Yes, I've heard the name."

The doctor guffawed. "He earned it, I reckon. I never realized what a sinister expression that missing optic gives the old ruffian. There was a skirmish during the war on the hillside yonder and a bullet cut it out. When we were boys we used to call him 'Old One-Eye.'"

"It interests me enormously." John Valiant spoke explosively.

"The stories of Devil-John would fill a mighty big book," said the major. "By all accounts he ought to have lived in the middle ages." Crossing the library, he looked into the dining-room. "I thought I remembered. The portrait over the con-

sole there is his wife, your great-grandmother. She was a wonderful swimmer, by the way," he went on, returning to his seat. "It was said she had swum across the Potomac in her hunting togs. When Devil-John heard of the feat, he swore he would marry her and he did. It was a love-match, no doubt, on her side; he must have been one to take with women. Even in those days, when men still lived picturesquely and weren't all cut to the same pattern, he must have been unique. There was something satanically splendid and savage about him. My great-uncle used to say he stood six feet two, and walked like an emperor on a love-spree. He was a man of sky-high rages, with fingers that could bend a gold coin double.

"They say he bet that when he brought his bride home, she should walk into Damory Court between rows of candlesticks worth twenty-thousand dollars. He made the wager good, too, for when she came up those steps out there, there was a row of ten candles burning on either side of the doorway, each held by a young slave worth a thousand dollars in the market. The whole state talked of the wedding and for a time Damory Court was ablaze with tea-parties and dances. That was in the old days of coaching and red-heeled slippers, when Virginia planters lived like viceroys and money was only to throw to the birds. They were fast livers and hard drinkers, and their passions ran away with

them. Devil-John's knew neither saddle nor bridle. Some say he grew jealous of his wife's beauty. There were any number of stories told of his cruelties to her that aren't worth repeating. She died early — poor lady — and your grandfather was the only issue. Devil-John himself lived to be past seventy, and at that age, when most men were stacking their sins and groaning with the gout, he was dicing and fox-hunting with the youngest of them. He always swore he would die with his boots on, and they say when the doctor told him he had only a few hours leeway, he made his slaves dress him completely and prop him on his horse. They galloped out so, a negro on either side of him. It was a stormy night, black as the Earl of Hell's riding-boots, with wind and lightning, and he rode cursing at both. There's an old black-gum tree a mile from here that they still call Devil-John's tree. They were just passing under it when the lightning struck it. Lightning has no effect on the black-gum, you know. The bolt glanced from the tree and struck him between the two slaves without harming either of them. It killed his horse, too. That's the story. To be sure at this date nobody can separate fact from fiction. Possibly he wasn't so much worse than the rest of his neighbors — not excepting even the parsons. 'Other times, other manners.'"

"They weren't any worse than the present gen-

eration," said the doctor malevolently. "Your four bottle men then knew only claret: now they punish whisky-straight. They still trice up their gouty legs to take after harmless foxes. And I dare say the women will be wearing red-heeled slippers again next year."

The major buried his nose in his julep for a long moment before he looked at the doctor blandly. "I agree with you, Bristow," he said; "but it's the first time I ever heard you admit that much good of your ancestors."

"Good!" said the doctor belligerently. "Me? I don't! I said people now were no better. As for the men of that time, they were a cheap swaggering lot of bullies and swash-bucklers. When I read history I'm ashamed to be descended from them."

"I desire to inform you, sah," said the major, stung, "that I too am a descendant of those bullies and swash-bucklers, as you call them. And I wish from my heart I thought we, nowadays, could hold a tallow-dip to them. Whatever their habits, they had their ideals, and they lived up to them."

"You refer, no doubt," said the doctor with sarcasm, "to our friend Devil-John and his ideal treatment of his wife!"

"No, sah," replied the major warmly. "I'm *not* referring to Devil-John. There were excep-

tions, no doubt, but for the most part they treated their women folk as I believe their Maker made them to be treated! The man who failed in his courtesy there, sah, was called to account for it. He was mighty apt to find himself standing in the cool dawn at the butt-end of a —"

He broke off and coughed. There was an awkward pause in which he set down his glass noisily and rose and stood before the open bookcase. "I envy you this, sah," he said with somewhat of haste. "A fine old collection. Bless my soul, what a curious volume!"

As he spoke, his hand jerked out a heavy-looking leather-back. Valiant, who had risen and stood beside him, saw instantly that what he had drawn from the shelf was the morocco case that held the rusted dueling-pistol! In the major's hands the broken box opened. A sudden startled look darted across his leonine face. With a smothered exclamation he thrust it back between the books and closed the glass door.

Valiant had paled. His previous finding of the weapon had escaped his mind. Now he read, as clearly as if it had been printed in black-letter across the sunny wall, the significance of the major's confusion. That weapon had been in his father's hand when he had faced his opponent in that fatal duel! It flashed across his mind as the doctor lunged for his hat and stick and got to his feet.

"Come, Bristow," said the latter irritably. "Your feet will grow fast to the floor presently. We mustn't talk a new neighbor to death. I've got to see a patient at six."

CHAPTER XXV

JOHN VALIANT ASKS A QUESTION

VALIANT went with them to the outer door. A painful thought was flooding his mind. It hampered his speech and it was only by a violent effort that he found voice:

"One moment! There is a question I would like to ask."

Both gentlemen had turned upon the steps and as they faced him he thought a swift glance passed between them. They waited courteously, the doctor with his habitual frown, the major's hand fumbling for the black ribbon on his waistcoat.

"Since I came here, I have heard"—his tone was uneven—"of a duel in which my father was a principal. There was such a meeting?"

"There was," said the doctor after the slightest pause of surprise. "Had you known nothing of it?"

"Absolutely nothing."

The major cleared his throat. "It was something he might naturally not have made a record

of," he said. "The two had been friends, and it — it was a fatal encounter for the other. The doctor and I were your father's seconds."

There was a moment's silence before Valiant spoke again. When he did his voice was steady, though drops had sprung to his forehead. "Was there any circumstance in that meeting that might be construed as reflecting on his — honor?"

"Good God, no!" said the major explosively.

"On his bearing as a gentleman?"

There was a hiatus this time in which he could hear his heart beat. In that single exclamation the major seemed to have exhausted his vocabulary. He was looking at the ground. It was the doctor who spoke at last, in a silence that to the man in the doorway weighed like a hundred atmospheres.

"No!" he said bluntly. "Certainly not. What put that into your head?"

When he was alone in the library Valiant opened the glass door and took from the shelf the morocco case. The old shiver of repugnance ran over him at the very touch of the leather. In the farthest corner was a low commode. He set the case on this and moved the big tapestry screen across the angle, hiding it from view.

The major and the doctor walked in silence till they had left Damory Court far behind them. Then the doctor observed caustically, "Nice graceful

little act of yours, yanking that infernal pistol out before his face like that!"

"How in Sam Hill could I guess?" the other retorted. "It's long enough since I saw that old case. I — I brought it there myself, Southall — that very morning, immediately after the meeting. To think of its lying there untouched in that empty room all these years!"

There was another silence. "How straight he put the question to us! Right out from the shoulder, for all the world like his father. Well, you said the right thing. There are times when a gentleman simply *has* to lie like one."

The doctor shut his teeth with a snap, as though he had caught a rabbit. "Look here, Bristow," he said hotly, "I've never cared a hang what your opinions of Valiant were after that duel. I'll keep my own."

"Oh, all right," rejoined the major. "But let's be honest with ourselves. If you could split a silver dollar nine times out of ten at fifteen paces, would you exchange shots with a man who was beside himself with liquor?"

"If Valiant was a dead shot, the better for him," said the doctor grimly. "If Sassoon was drunk, so much the worse for Sassoon. His condition was the affair of his seconds. Valiant was no more responsible for it than for the quarrel. Neither was of his making. Just because a man

is a crack shot and stays sober, is he to bear any insult — stand up to be shot at into the bargain — and take no hand in the game himself? Answer me that?"

"It didn't touch his honor, of course," replied the major. "We could all agree on that. He was within his rights. But it wasn't like a Valiant."

They were at the parting now and the major held out his hand. "Oh, well," he said, "it's long enough ago, and there's nothing against his son. I like the young chap, Southall. He's his father all over again, eh?"

"When I first saw him," said the doctor huskily, "I thought I had slid back thirty years and that our old Beauty Valiant was lying there before me. I loved him, Bristow, and somehow — whatever happened that day at the Hemlocks — it couldn't make a damned bit of difference to me!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CALL OF THE ROSES

IN the great hall at Damory Court the candles in their brass wall-sconces blinked back from the polished parquetry and the shining fire-dogs, filling the rather solemn gloom with an air of warmth and creature-comfort.

Leaning against the newel-post, Valiant gazed about him. How different it all looked from the night of his coming!

It occurred to him with a kind of wonder that a fortnight ago he had never known this house existed. Then he had conceived the old hectic life the only one worth knowing, the be-all and end-all of modern felicity. It was as if a single stroke had cut his life in two parts which had instantly recoiled as far asunder as the poles. Strangely, the new seemed more familiar than the old; there had been moments when he remembered the past almost as in the placid day one recalls a thriving dream of the night before, which, itself unreal, has left an overpowering impression behind it. Little fragments of the old nightly mosaic — the bitt-music across the dulled glisten of pounded asphalt,

the featherbone girl flaring high in air in electric rain, a pointed clock-tower spiking the upper night-gloom, the faint halitus of musk from a downy theater-wrap — fluttered about him. But all seemed far away, hackneyed, shop-worn, as banal as the scenery of an opera.

He began to walk up and down the floor, teasing pricks of restlessness urging him. He opened the door and passed into the unlighted dining-room. On the sideboard sat a silver loving-cup that had arrived the day before in a huge box with his books and knick-knacks. He had won it at polo. He lifted it, fingering its carved handles. He remembered that when that particular score had been made, Katharine Fargo had sat in one of the drags at the side-line.

But the memory evoked no thrill. Instead, the thought of her palely-cold, passionless beauty called up another mobile thoroughbred face instinct with quick flashings of mirth and hauteur. Again he felt the fierce clutch of small fingers, as they fought with his in that struggle for his life. Each line of that face stood before him — the arching brows, the cameo-delicacy of profile, the magnolia skin and hair like a brown-gold cloud across the sun.

A soft clicking patter trailed itself over the polished floor and the bulldog's nose was thrust between his knees. He bent down and fondled the satiny head to still the sudden surge of loneliness

that had overflowed his heart — an ache for he knew not what. A depression was on him, he knew not why — something that had a keen edge of longing like physical hunger.

He set back the loving-cup and went out to the front porch to prowl aimlessly up and down past the great gray-stained Ionic columns. It was not late, but the night was very still. The Virginia creeper waved gently to and fro in a soundless breeze that was little more than a whisper. The sky was heavily sprinkled with stars whose wan clustering was blotted here and there by floating shreds of cloud, like vaporous, filmy leaves stripped by some upper gale from the Tree of Heaven. The lawn lay a mass of mysterious shadow, stirring with faint chirps and rustles and laden with the poignant scent of the garden honeysuckle. He could hear the howl of a lonesome hound, a horse neighed impatiently on a distant meadow, and from far down the Red Road, beyond the gate, came the rude twitter of a banjo and the voice of the strolling darky player:

> "All Ah wants in dis creation —
> Pretty yellah gal, en er big plantation!"

When the twangling notes died away in the distance they had served only to intensify the stillness. He felt that peculiar detachedness that one senses in thick black dark, as though he and his im-

mediate surroundings were floating in some soundless, ambient ether. The white bulldog scurried noiselessly back and forth across the clipped grass, now emerging like a canine ghost in the light from the doorway, now suffering total eclipse. Staring into the furry gloom, he seemed, as in those moments of semi-delirium in the forest, to see Shirley's face advance and retreat as though it lay on the very pulsing heart of the darkness.

He stepped down to the graveled drive and followed it to the gate, then, bareheaded, took the Red Road. Along this highway he had rattled in Uncle Jefferson's crazy hack — with her red rose in his hand. The musky scent of the pressed leaves in the book in his pocket seemed to be all about him.

The odor of living roses, in fact, was in the air. It came on the scarce-felt breeze, a heavy calling perfume. He walked on, keeping the road by the misty infiltrating shimmer of the stars, with a sensation rather of gliding than of walking. Now and then from some pasture came the snort and whinny of horses or the grunt of a frog from a marshy sink, and once, where a narrow path joined the road, he felt against his trousers the sniffing nose of a silent and friendly puppy. It occurred to him that if, as scientists say, colors emit sound-tones, scents also should possess a music of their own: the honeysuckle fragrance, maybe — soft

mellow fluting as of diminutive wind-instruments; the far-faint sickly odor of lilies — the upper register of faery violins; this spicy breath of roses — blending, throbbing chords like elfin echoes of an Italian harp. The fancy pleased him; he could imagine the perfume now in the air carried with it an under-music, like a ghostly harping.

It came to him at the same instant that this was no mere fancy. Somewhere in the languorous night a harp was being played. He paused and listened intently, then went on toward the sound. Presently he became aware that he had passed it, had left it on one side, and he went back, stumbling along the low stone wall till it opened to a shadowy lane, full of foliaged whispers. The rose scent had grown stronger; it was almost, in that heavy air, as if he were breasting an etherial sea of attar. He felt as if he were treading on a path of rose-leaves, down which the increasing melody flowed crimsonly to him, calling, calling.

He stopped stock-still. He had been skirting a close-cropped hedge of box. This had ended abruptly and he was looking straight up a bar of green-yellow radiance from a double doorway. The latter opened on a porch and the light, flung across this, drenched an arbor of climbing roses, making it stand out a mass of woven rubies set in emerald.

He drew a long sigh of more than delight, for

framed in the doorway he saw a figure in misty white, leaning to the gilded upright of a harp. He knew at once that it was Shirley. Holding his breath, he came closer, his feet muffled in the thick grass. She wore a gown of some gauze-like material sprinkled with knots of embroidery and with her lifted face and filmy aureole of hair, she looked like a tall golden candle. He stood in the dense obscurity, one hand gripping the gnarled limb of a catalpa, his eyes following the shapely arms from wrist to shoulder, the fingers straying across the strings, the bending cheek caressing the carved wood. She was playing the melody of Shelley's *Indian Serenade* — touching the chords softly and tenderly — and his lips moved, molding themselves soundlessly to the words:

"I arise from dreams of thee,
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low
And the stars are shining bright;
I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Has led me — who knows how?
To thy chamber window, Sweet!"

The serenade died in a single long note. As if in answer to it there rose a flood of bird-music from beyond the arbor — jets of song that swelled and rippled to a soaring melody. She heard it, too, for the gracile fingers fell from the strings. She lis-

tened a moment, with head held to one side, then sprang up and came through the door and down the steps.

He hesitated a moment, then a single stride took him from the shadow.

CHAPTER XXVII

BEYOND THE BOX-HEDGE

AS he greeted her, his gaze plunged deep into hers. She had recoiled a step, startled, to recognize him almost instantly. He noted the shrinking and thought it due to a stabbing memory of that forest-horror. His first words were prosaic enough:

"I'm an unconscionable trespasser," he said. "It must seem awfully prowly, but I didn't realize I was on private property till I passed the hedge there."

As her hand lay in his, a strange fancy stirred in him: in that wood-meeting she had seemed something witch-like, the wilful spirit of the passionate spring herself, mixed of her aerial essences and jungle wildernesses; in this scented dim-lit close she was grave-eyed, subdued, a paler pensive woman of under half-guessed sadnesses and haunting moods. With her answer, however, this gravity seemed to slip from her like a garment. She laughed lightly.

"I love to prowl myself. I think sometimes I

like the night better than the day. I believe in one of my incarnations I must have been a panther."

"Do you know," he said, "I followed the scent of those roses? I smelled it at Damory Court."

"It goes for miles when the air is heavy as it is to-night. How terrible it would be if roses were intoxicating like poppies! I get almost tipsy with the odor sometimes, like a cat with catnip."

They both laughed. "I'm growing superstitious about flowers," he said. "You know a rose figured in our first meeting. And in our last —"

She shrank momentarily. "The cape jessamines! I shall always think of *that* when I see them!"

"Ah, forgive me!" he begged. "But when I remember what you did — for me! Oh, I know! But for you, I must have died."

"But for me you wouldn't have been bitten. But don't let's talk of it." She shivered suddenly.

"You are cold," he said. "Isn't that gown too thin for this night air?"

"No, I often walk here till quite late. Listen!"

The bird song had broken forth again, to be answered this time by a rival's in a distant thicket. "My nightingale is in good voice."

"I never heard a nightingale before I came to Virginia. I wonder why it sings only at night."

"What an odd idea! Why, it sings in the daytime, too."

"Really? But I suppose it escapes notice in the general chorus. Is it a large bird?"

"No; smaller than a thrush. Only a little bigger than a robin. Its nest is over there in that hedge — a tiny loose cup of dried oak-leaves, lined with hair, and the eggs are olive color. How pretty the hedge looks now, all tangled with firefly sparks!"

"Doesn't it! Uncle Jefferson calls them 'lightning-bugs.'"

"The name is much more picturesque. But all the darky sayings are. I heard him telling our butler once, of something, that 'when de debble heah dat, he gwine sen' fo' he smellin'-salts.' Who else would ever have put it that way? Do you find him and Aunt Daph useful?"

"He has been a godsend," he said fervently; "and her cooking has taught me to treat her with passionate respect. As Uncle Jefferson says she can 'put de big pot in de li'l one en mek soup outer de laigs.' He's teaching me now about flowers — it's surprising how many kinds he knows. He's a walking herbarium."

"Come and see mine," she said. "Roses are our specialty — we have to live up to the Rosewood name. But beyond the arbors, are beds and beds of other flowers. See — by this big tree are speedwell and delphinium. The tree is a black-walnut. It's a dreadful thing to have one as big as that.

When you want something that costs a lot of money you go and look at it and wonder which you want most, that particular luxury or the tree. I know a girl who had two in her yard only a little bigger than this, and she went to Europe on them. But so far I've always voted for the tree."

"Perhaps you've not been sufficiently tempted."

"Maybe," she assented, and in a bar of light from a window, stooped over a glimmering patch to pull him a sprig of bluebells. "The wildings are hard to find," she said, "so I grow a few here. What ghostly tintings they show in this half-light! My corn-flowers aren't in bloom yet. Here are wild violets. They are the single ones, you know, the kind two children play cock-fighting with." She picked two of the blossoms and hooked their heads together. "See, both pull till one rooster's head drops off." She bent again and passed her hand lovingly over a mass of starry blooms. "And here are some bluet, the violet roosters' little pale-blue hens. How does *your* garden come on?"

"Famously. Uncle Jefferson has shanghaied a half-dozen negro gardeners — from where I can't imagine — and he's having the time of his life hectoring over them. He refers to the upper and lower terraces as 'up- and down-stairs.' I've got seeds, but it will be a long time before they flower."

"Oh, would you like some slips?" she cried. "Or, better still, I can give you the roses already

rooted — Mad Charles and Maréchal Neil and Cloth of Gold and cabbage and ramblers. We have geraniums and fuchsias, too, and the coral honeysuckle. That's different from the wild one, you know."

"You are too good! If you would only advise me where to set them! But I dare say you think me presuming."

She turned her full face to him. "'Presuming!' You're punishing me now for the dreadful way I talked to you about Damory Court — before I knew who you were. Oh, it was unpardonable! And after the splendid thing you had done — I read about it that same evening — with your money, I mean!"

"No, no!" he protested. "There was nothing splendid about it. It was only pride. You see the Corporation was my father's great idea — the thing he created and put his soul into — and it was foundering. I know that would have hurt him. One thing I've wanted to say to you, ever since the day we talked together — about the duel. I want to say that whatever lay behind it, my father's whole life was darkened by that event. Now that I can put two and two together, I know that it was the cause of his sadness."

"Ah, I can believe that," she replied.

"I think he had only two interests — myself and the Corporation. So you see why I'd rather save

that and be a beggar the rest of my natural life. But I'm not a beggar. Damory Court alone is worth — I know it now — a hundred times what I left."

"But to give up your own world — to let it all slip by, and to come here to a spot that to you must seem desperately dull."

"I came here because the door of the old life was closed to me."

"You closed it yourself," she answered quickly.

"Maybe. But for whatever reason, it was closed. And you call this dull — *dull?* Why, my life seems never to have had real interest before!"

"I'm so glad you think that! You are so utterly different from what I imagined you!"

"I could never have imagined you," he said, "never."

"I must be terribly outré."

"You are so many women in one. When I listened to your harp playing I could hardly believe it was the same you I saw galloping across the fields that morning. Now you are a different woman from both of those."

As she looked at him, her lips curled cornerwise, her foot slipped on the sheer edge of the turf. She swayed toward him and he caught her, feeling for a sharp instant the adorable nearness of her body. It ridged all his skin with a creeping delight. She recovered her footing with an ex-

clamation, and turned back somewhat abruptly to the porch where she seated herself on the step, drawing her filmy skirt aside to make a place for him. There was a moment of silence which he broke.

"That exquisite serenade you were playing! You know the words, of course."

"They are more lovely, if possible, than the score. Do you care for poetry?"

"I've always loved it," he said. "I've been reading some lately — a little old-fashioned book I found at Damory Court. It's *Lucile*. Do you know it?"

"Yes. It's my mother's favorite."

He drew it from his pocket. "See, I've got it here. It's marked, too."

He opened it, to close it instantly — not, however, before she had put out her hand and laid it, palm down, on the page. "That rose! Oh, let me have it!"

"Never!" he protested. "Look here. When I put it between the leaves, I did so at random. I didn't see till now that I had opened it at a marked passage."

"Let us read it," she said.

He leaned and held the leaf to the light from the doorway and the two heads bent together over the text.

A sound fell behind them and both turned. A

slight figure, in a soft gray gown with old lace at the throat, stood in the doorway behind them. John Valiant sprang to his feet.

"Ah, Shirley, I thought I heard voices. Is that you, Chilly?"

"It's not Mr. Lusk, mother," said Shirley. "It's our new neighbor, Mr. Valiant."

As he bent over the frail hand, murmuring the conventional words that presentations are believed to require, Mrs. Dandridge sank into a deep cushioned chair. "Won't you sit down?" she said. He noticed that she did not look directly at him, and that her face was as pallid as her hair.

"Thank you," said John Valiant, and resumed his place on the lower step.

Shirley, who had again seated herself, suddenly laughed, and pointed to the book which lay between them. "Imagine what we were doing, dearest! We were reading *Lucile* together."

She saw the other wince, and the deep dark eyes lifted, as if under compulsion, from the book-cover to Valiant's face. He was startled by Shirley's cry and the sudden limp unconscious settling-back into the cushions of the fragile form.

CHAPTER XXVIII

NIGHT

A QUICKER breeze was stirring as John Valiant went back along the Red Road. It brushed the fraying clouds from the sky, leaving it a pale gray-blue, sprinkled with wan stars. He had waited in the garden at Rosewood till Shirley, aided by Emmaline and with Ranston's anxious face hovering in the background, having performed those gentle offices which a woman's fainting spell requires, had come to reassure him and to say good night.

The road seemed no longer dark; it swam before him now in a soft winged mistiness with here and there an occasional cedar thrusting grotesquely above huddled cobble-wall and black-lined rail-fence. As he went, her form swam before him. The texture of each shadowy bush seemed that gauzy drapery, sprayed with lilies-of-the-valley, and the leaves syllabled her name in cautious whispers. That brief touch of her, when he had caught her in his arms, lingered, as the memory of the harp music on his inner ear, pricking his senses like fine

musk, a thing of soft new pulses flashing over him like spurts of vapor.

As he threw off his coat in the bedroom he had chosen for his own, he felt the hard corner of the *Lucile* in the pocket, and drawing it out, laid it on the table by the bedside. He seemed to feel again the tingle of his cheek where a curling strand of her coppery hair had sprung against it when her head had bent beside his own to read the marked lines. By now perhaps that riotous crown was all unbound and falling redly about her shoulders, those shoulders no longer peeping from a weave of lilies, but draped in virginal white. Perhaps she knelt now by her silk-covered bed, warming the coverlid with her breast, her down-bent face above her locked palms. What did she pray for, he wondered. As a child, his own prayers had been comprehensive ones. Even the savages who lived at Wishing-House and their innumerable offspring had been regularly included in those petitions.

When he had undressed he sat an hour in the candle-blaze, a dressing-gown thrown over his shoulders, striving vainly to recreate that evening call, to remember her every word and look and movement. For a breath her face would flush suddenly before him, like a live thing; then it would mysteriously fade and elude him, though he clenched his hands on the arms of his chair in the fierce mental effort to recall it. Only the intense blue of her

eyes, the tawny sweep of her hair — these and the touch of her, the consciousness of her warm and vivid fragrance, remained to wrap all his senses in a mist woven of gold and fire.

Shirley, meanwhile, had sat some time beside her mother's bed, leaning from a white chintz-covered chair, her anxiety only partially allayed by reassurances, now and then stooping to lay her young cheek against the delicate arm in its lacy sleeve or to pass her hand lovingly up and down its outline, noting with a recurrent passion of tenderness the transparency of the skin with its violet veining and the shadows beneath the closed eyes. Emmaline, moving on soft worsted-shod feet about the dim room, at length had whispered:

"You go tuh baid, honey. I stay with Mis' Judith till she go tuh sleep."

"Yes, go, Shirley," said her mother. "Haven't I any privileges at all? Can't I even faint when I feel like it, without calling out the fire-brigade? You'll pamper me to death and heaven knows I don't need it."

"You won't let me telephone for Doctor Southall?"

"Certainly not!"

"And you are *sure* it was nothing but the roses?"

"Why, what else should it be?" said her mother almost peevishly. "I must really have the arbors

thinned out. On heavy nights it's positively overpowering. Go along now, and we'll talk about it to-morrow. I can ring if I want anything."

In her own room Shirley undressed thoughtfully. There was between her and her mother a fine tenuous bond of sympathy and feeling as rare, perhaps, as it was lovely. She could not remember when the other had not been a semi-invalid, and her earliest childhood recollections were punctuated with the tap of the little cane. To-night's sudden indisposition had shocked and disturbed her; to faint at a rush of perfume seemed to suggest a growing weakness that was alarming. To-morrow, she told herself, she would send Ranston with a wagon-load of the roses to the hospital at Charlottesville.

She slipped on a pink shell-shaded dressing-gown of slinky silk with a riot of azaleas scattered in the weave, and then, dragging a chair before the open window, drew aside the light curtain and began to brush her hair. She parted the lustrous mass with long sweeps of her white arm, forward first over one shoulder, then over the other. The silver brush smoothed the lighter ashen ripples that netted and fretted into a fine amber lace, till they lay, a rich warm mahogany like red earth. The coppery whorls eddied and merged themselves, showing under-glints of russet and dun-gold, curling and clasping in flame-tinted furrows like a living field of gold under a silver harrow. Outside the window

the stars lay on the lapis-lazuli sky like white flower-petals on still deep water, and in the pasture across the hedges she could see the form of Selim, her chestnut hunter, standing ghostly, like an equine sentinel.

When that shimmering glory lay in two thick braids against her shoulders, Shirley rose with a sigh and went to her writing-desk, where lay her diary. But she was in no mood to write, and she turned from it, frowning a little, with the reflection that she had not written in it since the night of the cape jessamines.

All at once her gaze fell upon the floor, and she shrank backward from a twisting thread-like thing whose bright saffron-yellow glowed sharply against the dark carpet. She saw in an instant, however, that it was nothing more dangerous than a fragment of love-vine from the garden, which had clung to her skirt. She picked up the tiny mass of tendrils and with a slow smile tossed it over her right shoulder through the window. "If it takes root," she said aloud, "my sweetheart loves me." She leaned from the sill to peer down into the misty garden, but could not follow its fall.

Long ago her visitor would have reached Damory Court. She had a vision of him wandering, candle in hand, through the empty echoing rooms, looking at the voiceless portraits on the walls, thinking perhaps of his father, of the fatal duel of which he

had never known. She liked the way he had spoken of his father!

Or, maybe he was sitting in the lonely library, with some volume from its shelves on his knees. She pictured Uncle Jefferson fetching his pipe and jar of tobacco and striking the match on his broad foot to light it. She remembered one of the old darky's sayings: "Er man ain' nachally no angel, but 'thouten terbacker, Ah reck'n he be pizen-ugly ernuf ter giv de Bad Man de toof-ache!" In that instant when her cheek had touched his rough tweed jacket, she had been sensible of that woodsy pipy fragrance.

A vivid flush swept up her face and with a sudden gesture she caught her open palms to her cheek. With what a daring softness his eyes had hazed as they looked down at her under his crisp waving hair. Why was the memory of that look so sharply sweet?

As she leaned, out of the stillness there came to her ear a mellow sound. It was the bell of the courthouse in the village. She counted the strokes falling clearly or faintly as the sluggish breeze ebbed or swelled. It was eleven.

She drew back, dropped the curtain to shut out the wan glimmer, and in the darkness crept into the soft bed as if into a hiding-place.

CHAPTER XXIX

AT THE DOME

A WARM sun and an air mildly mellow. A faint gold-shadowed mist over the valley and a soft lilac haze blending the rounded outlines of the hills. A breeze shook the twigs on the cedars, fluttered the leaves of the poplars till they looked a quivering mass of palpitating silver, bearing away with it the cool elastic grace-notes of the dripping water, as it sparkled over the big green-streaked rocks at the foot of the little lake at Damory Court. Over the wild grape-vines a pair of drunken butterflies reeled, kissing wings, and on the stone rim of the fountain basin a tiny brown-green lizard lay motionless, sunning itself. Through the shrubbery a cardinal darted like a crimson shuttle, to rock impudently from a fleering limb, and here and there on the bluish-ivory sky, motionless as a pasted wafer, hung a hawk; from time to time one of these wavered and slanted swiftly down, to climb once more in a huge spiral to its high tower of sky.

Perhaps it wondered, as its telescopic eye looked down. That had been its choicest covert, that disheveled tangle where the birds held perpetual carni-

val, the weasel lurked in the underbrush and the rabbit lined his windfall. Now the wildness was gone. The lines of the formal garden lay again ordered and fair. The box-rows had been thinned of their too-aged shrubs and filled in anew. The wilderness garden to-be was still a stretch of raked and level soil, but all across this slender green spears were thrusting up — the promise of buds and blooms. A pergola, glistening white, now upheld the runaway vines, making a sickle-like path from the upper terrace to the lake. In the barn loft the pigeons still quarrelled over their new cotes of fresh pine, and under a clump of locust trees at a little distance from the house, a half-dozen dolls' cabins on stilts stood waiting the honey-storage of the black and gold bees.

There were new denizens, also. These had arrived in a dozen zinc tanks and willow hampers, to the amaze of a sleepy express clerk at the railroad station: two swans now sailed majestically over the lily-pads of the lake, along its gravel rim a pair of bronze-colored ducks waddled and preened, and its placid surface rippled and broke to the sluggish backs of goldfish and the flirting fins of red Japanese carp. Hens and guinea-fowl strutted and ran in a wire wattle behind the kitchen, and on the wall, now straightened and repaired, a splendid peacock spread his barbaric plumage of spangled purple and screeched exultingly to his sober-hued mate.

The house itself wore another air. Its look of unkemptness had largely vanished. The comb of the roof had been straightened and the warped shutters repaired. The boards of the porch flooring had been relaid. Moss and green lichen had been scoured from the bases of the great weather-beaten pillars. These, however, bore no garish coat of new paint. The soft gray tone of age remained, but the bleakness and forlornness were gone; there was about all now a warmth and genial bearing that hinted at mellowed beauty, firelight and cheerful voices within.

Valiant heaved a long sigh of satisfaction as he stood in the sunlight gazing at the results of his labors. He was not now the flippant boulevardier to whom money was the *sine qua non* of existence. He had learned a sovereign lesson — one gained not through the push and fight of crowds, but in the simple peace of a countryside, unvexed by the clamor of gold and the complex problems of a competitive existence — that he had inherited a need of activity, of achievement: that he had been born to do. He had worked hard, with hand and foot, with hoe and mattock — strenuous perspiring effort that made his blood course fast and brought muscle-weariness over which nature had nightly poured her soothing medicaments of peace and sleep. His tanned face was as clear as a fine brown porcelain,

his eye bright, and his muscles rippled up under his skin with elastic power.

"Chum," he said, to the dog rolling on his back in the grass, "what do you think of it all, anyway?" He reached down, seized a hind leg and whirling him around like a teetotum, sent him flying into the bushes, whence Chum launched again upon him, like a catapult. He caught the white shoulders and held him vise-like. "Just about right, eh? But wait till we get those ramblers!"

"And to think," he continued, whimsically releasing him, "that I might have gone on, one of the little-neck-clam crowd I've always trained with, at the same old pace, till the Vermouth-cocktail-Palm-Beach career got a double Nelson on me and the umpire counted me out. And I'd have ended by lazying along through my forties with a bay-window and a bunch of boudoir keys! Now I can kiss my hand to it all. At this moment I wouldn't swap this old house and land, and the sunshine and that 'gyarden' and Unc' Jefferson and Aunt Daph and the chickens and the birds and all the rest of it, for a mile of Millionaires' Row."

He drew from his jacket pocket a somewhat worn note and unfolded the dainty paper with its characteristic twirly handwriting. "The scarlet geraniums rimming the porch," he muttered, "the coral honeysuckle on the old dead tulip-tree, and the

fuchsias and verbenas by the straight walk. How right she is! They're all growing, too. I haven't lost a single slip." He caught himself up short, strode to the nearest porch-pillar and rapped on it smartly with his knuckles.

"I must knock on wood," he said, "or I'll lose my luck." He laughed a little. "I'm certainly catching Uncle Jefferson's superstitions. Perhaps that's in the soil, too!"

He went into the house and to the library. The breeze through the wide-flung bow-window was fluttering the papers on the desk and the map on the wall was flapping sidewise. He went to straighten it, and then saw what he had not noticed before — that it covered something that had been let into the plaster. He swung it aside and made an exclamation.

He was looking at a square, uncompromising wall-safe, with a round figured disk of white metal on its face. He knelt before it and tried its knob. After a moment it turned easily. But the resolute steel door would not open, though he tried every combination that came into his mind. "No use," he said disgustedly. "One must have the right numbers."

Then he lifted his fretted frame and smote his grimy hands together. "Confound it!" he said with a short laugh. "Here I am, a bankrupt, with all this outfit — clear to the very finger-bowls —

handed to me on a silver tray, and I'm mad as scat because I can't open the first locked thing I find!"

He ran up-sairs and donned a rough corduroy jacket and high leather leggings. "We're going to climb the hill to-day, Chum," he announced, "and no more moccasins need apply."

In the lower hall, however, he suddenly stopped stock-still. "The slip of paper that was in the china dog!" he exclaimed. "What a chump I am not to have thought of it!" He found it in its pigeonhole and, kneeling down before the safe, tried the numbers carefully, first right, then left: 17 — 28 — 94 — 0. The heavy door opened.

"I was right!" he exulted. "It's the plate." He drew it out, piece by piece. Each was bagged in dark-red Canton flannel. He broke the tape of one bag and exposed a great silver pitcher, tarnished purple-blue like a raven's wing — then a tea-service. Each piece, large and small, was marked with the greyhound rampant and the motto. "And to think," he said, "that my great-great-grandfather buried you with his own hands under the stables when Tarleton's raiders swept the valley before the surrender at Yorktown! Only wait till Aunt Daphne gets you polished up, and on the sideboard! You're the one thing the place has needed!"

With the dog for comrade he traversed the garden and plunged across the valley below, humming

as he went one of the songs with which Uncle Jefferson was wont to regale his labors:

"My gran'mothah lived on yondah li'l green,
Fines' ol' lady *evah* wuz seen.
Tummy-eye, tummy-oh, tummy-umpy-tumpy-tee.
Fines' ol' lady *evah* yo' see!"

The ridiculous refrain rang out through the bewildering vistas of the wooded slope as he swung on, up the hill, through the underbrush.

The place was pathless and overgrown with paw-paw bushes and sassafras. Great trees stood so thickly in places as to make a twilight and the sunnier spots were masses of pink laurel, poison-ivy, flaming purple rhododendron and wine-red tendrils of interbraided briers. This was the forest land of whose possibilities he had thought. In the heart of the woods he came upon a great limb that had been wrenched off by storm. The broken wood was of a deep rich brown, shading to black. He broke off his song, snapped a twig and smelled it. Its sharp acrid odor was unmistakable. He suddenly remembered the walnut tree at Rosewood and what Shirley had said: "I know a girl who had two in her yard, and she went to Europe on them."

He looked about him; as far as he could see the trees reared, hardy and perfect, untouched for a generation. He selected one of medium size and pulling a creeper, measured its circumference and

gaging this measure with his eye, made a penciled calculation on the back of an envelope. "Great Scott!" he said jubilantly to the dog; "that would cut enough to wainscot the Damory Court library and build twenty sideboards!"

He sat down on a mossed boulder, breathless, his eyes sparkling. He had thought himself almost a beggar, and here in his hand was a small fortune! "Talk about engagement rings!" he muttered. "Why, a dozen of these ought to buy a whole tiara!"

Far below him he could see the square tower of the old parish church of St. Andrew. The day before he had gone there to service, slipping into a pew at the rear. There had been flowers in silver vases on either side of the reading-desk, and dim hues from the stained-glass windows had touched the gray head of the rector above the brass lectern and the crooked oak beams of the roof, and he had caught himself all at once thinking that but for its drooping hat, Shirley's head might have outshone that of the saint through whose bright mantle the colors came. After the service the rector had showed him the vestry and the church books with their many records of Valiants before him, and he had sat for a moment in the Valiant pew, fancying her standing there sometime beside him, with her trim gloved hand by his on the prayer-book.

At length he rose and climbed on, presently turn-

ing at a right-angle to bisect the strip to its boundary before he paused to rest. "I'm no timber-cruiser," he said to himself as he wiped his brow, "but I calculate there are all of three hundred trees big enough to cut. Why, suppose they are worth on an average only a hundred apiece. That would make — Good lord!" he muttered, "and I've been mooning about poverty!"

The growth was smaller and sparser now and before long he came, on the hill's very crest, to the edge of a ragged clearing. It held a squalid settlement, perhaps a score of dirt-daubed cabins little better than hovels, some of them mere mud-walled lean-tos, with sod roofs and window-panes of flour-sacking. Fences and outhouses there was none. Littered paths rambled aimlessly hither and thither from chip-strewn yards to starved patches of corn, under-cultivated and blighted. Over the whole place hung an indescribable atmosphere of disconsolate filth, of unredeemed squalor and vileness. Razor-backed hogs rooted everywhere, snapped at by a handful of lean and spiritless hounds. A slatternly woman lolled under a burlap awning beside one of the cabins from whose interior came the sound of men's voices raised in a fierce quarrel. Undisturbed by the hideous din, a little girl of about three years was dragging by a string an old cigar-box in which was propped a rag-doll. She was barelegged and barearmed, her tiny limbs burned

a dark red by the sun, and she wore a single garment made from the leg of a patched pair of overalls. Her hair, bleached the color of corn-silk, fell over her face in elfin wildness.

With one hand on the dog's collar, hushing him to silence, Valiant, unseen, looked at the wretched place with a shiver. He had glimpsed many wretched purlieus in the slums of great cities, but this, in the open sunlight, with the clean woods about it and the sweet clear blue above, stood out with an unrelieved boldness and contrast that was doubly sinister and forbidding. He knew instantly that the tawdry corner was the community known as Hell's-Half-Acre, the place to which Shirley had made her night ride to rescue Rickey Snyder.

A quick glad realization of her courage rushed through him. On its heels came a feeling of shame that a spot like this could exist, a foul blot on such a landscape. It was on his own land! Its denizens held place by squatter sovereignty, but he was, nevertheless, their landlord. The thought bred a new sense of responsibility. Something should be done for them, too — for that baby, dragging its rag-doll in the cigar-box, poor little soul, abandoned to a life of besottedness, ignorance and evil!

As he gazed, the uproar in the cabin reached a climax. A red-bearded figure in nondescript garments shot from the door and collapsed in a heap in the dirt. He got up with a dreadful oath — a

thrown jug grazing his temple as he did so — and shaking his fist behind him, staggered into a near-by lean-to.

Valiant turned away with a feeling almost of nausea, and plunged back down the forest hillside, the shrill laughter of the woman under the strip of burlap echoing in his ears.

CHAPTER XXX

THE GARDENERS

HE saw them coming through the gate on the Red Road — the major and Shirley in a lilac muslin by his side — and strode to meet them. Behind them Ranston propelled a hand-cart filled with paper bundles from each of which protruded a bunch of flowering stems. There was a flush in Shirley's cheek as her hand lay in Valiant's. As for him, his eyes, like wilful drunkards, returned again and again, between the major's compliments, to her face.

"You have accomplished wonders, sah! I had no idea so much could be done in such a limited time. We are leisurely down here, and seldom do to-day what can be put off till to-morrow. Real Northern hustle, eh, Shirley? You have certainly primped the old place up. I could almost think I was looking at Damory Court in the sixties, sah!"

"That's quite the nicest thing you could have said, Major," responded Valiant. "But it needs the flowers." He looked at Shirley with sparkling eyes. "How splendid of you to bring them! I feel like a robber."

"With our bushels of them? We shall never miss them at all. Have you set out the others?"

"I have, indeed. Every one has rooted, too. You shall see them." He led the way up the drive till they stood before the porch.

"Gad!" chuckled the major. "Who would think it had been unoccupied for three decades? At this rate, you'll soon be giving dances, sah."

"Ah," said Valiant. "That's the very thing I want to suggest. The tournament comes off next week, I understand, and it's been the custom to have a ball that night. The tourney ground is on this estate, and Damory Court is handier than the Country Club. Why wouldn't it be appropriate to hold the dance here? The ground-floor rooms are in order, and if the young people would put up with it, it would be a great pleasure to me, I assure you."

"Oh!" breathed Shirley. "That would be too wonderful!"

The major seized his hand and shook it heartily. "I can answer for the committee," he said. "They'll jump at it. Why, sah, the new generation has never set eyes inside the house. It's a golden legend to them."

"Then I'll go ahead with arrangements."

Shirley's eyes were overrunning the cropped lawn, which now showed a clear smooth slope between the arching trees. "It was lovely in its ruin," she said, "but it was pathetic, too. Unc' Jefferson used to

say 'De ol' place look lak et ben griebin' etse'f ter deff wid lonesomeness.' Somehow, now it looks glad. Just hear that small citizen!"

A red squirrel sat up in a tree-crotch, his paws tucked into his furry breast, barking angrily at them. "He's shocked at the house-cleaning," she said; "a sign he's a bachelor."

"So am I," said Valiant.

"Maybe he's older than you," she countered; "and sot in his ways."

"I accept him as a warning," he said, and she laughed with him.

He led them around the house and down the terraces of the formal garden, and here the major's encomiums broke forth again. "You are going to take us old folks back, sah," he said with real feeling. "This gyarden in its original lines was unique. It had a piquancy and a picturesqueness that, thank God, are to be restored! One can understand the owner of an estate like this having no desire to spend his life philandering abroad. We all hope, sah, that you will recur to the habit of your ancestors, and count Damory Court home."

Valiant smiled slowly. "I don't dream of anything else," he said. "My life, as I map it out, seems to begin here. The rest doesn't count — only the years when I was little and had my father."

The major carefully adjusted his eye-glasses. His head was turned away. "Ah, yes," he said.

"The last twenty years," continued the other, "from my present view-point, are valuable mainly for contrast."

"As a consistent regimen of *pâté de foie gras*," said Shirley quizzically, "makes one value bread and butter?"

He shook his head at her. "As starvation makes one appreciate plenty. The next twenty years are to be here. But they hold side-trips, too. Now and then there's a jaunt back to the city."

"Contrast again?" she asked interestedly.

"Yes and no. Yes, because no one who has never known that blazing clanging life can really understand the peace and blessedness of a place like this. No, because there are some things which are to be found only there. There are the galleries and the opera. I need a breath of them both."

"You're right," nodded the major. "Birds are birds, and Melba is Melba. But a sward like this in the early morning, with the dew on the grass, is the best opera for a steady diet."

"I called them only side-trips," said John Valiant.

"And semi-occasional longer flights, too," the major reflected. "A look-see abroad once in a blue moon. Why not?"

"Yes. For mental photographs — impressions one can't get from between book-covers. There's an old cloister garden I know in Italy and a particular river-bank in Japan in the cherry-blossom season,

and a tiny island with a Greek castle on it in the Ægean. Little colored memories for me to bring away to dream over. But always I come back here to Damory Court. For this is — home!"

They walked beneath the pergola to the lake, where Shirley gave a cry of delight at sight of its feathered population. "Where *did* you get them from?" she asked.

"Washington. In crates."

"That explains it," she exclaimed. "One day last week the little darkies in the village all insisted a circus was coming. They must have seen these being hauled here. They watched the whole afternoon for the elephants."

"Poor youngsters!" he said. "It's a shame to fool them. But I've had all the circus I want getting the live stock installed."

"They won't suffer," said the major. "Rickey Snyder'll get them up a three-ringed show at the drop of a hat and drop it herself. Besides, there's tournament day coming, and they can live on that. I see you've dredged out some of the lilies."

"Yes. I take my dip here every morning."

"We used to have a diving-board when we were little shavers," pursued the major. "I remember once, your father —"

He cleared his throat and stopped dead.

"Please," said John Valiant, "I — I like to hear about him."

"It was only that I struck my head on a rock on the bottom and — stayed down. The others were frightened, but he — he dove down again and again till he brought me out. It was a narrow squeak, I reckon."

A silence fell. Looking at the tall muscular form beside her, Shirley had a sudden vision of a determined little body cleaving the dark water, over and over, now rising panting for breath, now plunging again, never giving up. And she told herself that the son was the same sort. That hard set of the jaw, those firm lips, would know no flinching. He might suffer, but he would be strong. Subconsciously her mind was also swiftly contrasting him with Chilly Lusk: the same spare lithe frame but set off by light skin, brown hair and hazel eyes; the two faces, alike sharply and clearly chiseled, but this one purged of the lazy scorn, the satiety, and reckless indulgence.

Half unconsciously she spoke her thought aloud: "You look like your father, do you not?"

"Yes," he replied, "there's a strong likeness. I have a photograph which I'll show you sometime. But how did you know?"

"Perhaps I only guessed," she said in some confusion. To cover this she stooped by the pebbly marge and held out her hand to the bronze ducks that pushed and gobbled about her fingers. "What have you named them?" she asked.

"Nothing. *You* christen them."

"Very well. The light one shall be Peezletree and the dark one Pilgarlic. I got the names from John Jasper — he was Virginia's famous negro preacher. I once heard him hold forth when he read from one of the Psalms — the one about the harp and the psaltery — and he called it peezletree."

"Speaking of ducks," said the major, tweaking his gray imperial, "reminds me of Judge Chalmers' white mallard. He had a pair that were so much in love they did nothing but loaf around honey-cafuddling with their wings over each other's backs. It was a lesson in domesticity for the community, sah. Well, the drake got shot for a wild one, and if you'll believe it, the poor little duck was that inconsolable it would have brought tears to your eyes. The whole Chalmers family were affected."

Shirley had put one hand over her mouth to repress a smile. "Major, Major!" she murmured reprovingly. But his guilty glance avoided her.

"Yes, sah, nothing would console her. So at last Chalmers got another drake, the handsomest he could find, and trotted him out to please her. What do you reckon that little white duck did? She looked at the judge once reproachfully and then waddled down to a black muck-bed and lay down in it. She came out with as fine a suit of mourning as you ever saw. And believe it or not, sah, but she wouldn't go in the water for ten days!"

Valiant's laugh rang out over the lake — to be answered by a sudden sharp screech from the terrace, where the peacock strutted, a blaze of spangled purple and gold. They turned to see Aunt Daphne issue from the kitchen, twig-broom in hand.

"Heah!" she exclaimed. "What fo' yo' kyahin' on like er wil' gy*raff* we'n we got comp'ny, yo' triflin' ol' fan-tail, yo'! Git outen heah!" She waved her weapon and the bird, with a raucous shriek of defiance, retired in ruffled disorder. The master of Damory Court looked at Shirley. "What shall we name *him?*"

"I'd call him Fire-Cracker if he goes off like that," she said. And Fire-Cracker the bird was christened forthwith.

"And now," said Shirley, "let's set out the ramblers."

The major had brought a rough plan, sketched from memory, of the old arrangement of the formal garden. "I'll just go over the lines of the beds with Unc' Jefferson," he proposed, "while you two potter over these roses." So Valiant and Shirley walked back up the slope beneath the pergola together. The sun was westering fast, and long lilac cloud-trails lay over the terraces. But the bumbling bees were still busy in the honeysuckle and hawking dragon-flies shot hither and thither. A robin was tilting on the rim of the fountain and it looked at them with head turned sidewise, with a low sweet pipe that

mingled with the trickling laugh of the falling water.

With Ranston puffing and blowing like a black porpoise over his creaking go-cart, they planted the ramblers — crimson and pink and white — Valiant much of the time on his knees, his hands plunging deep into the black spongy earth, and Shirley with broad hat flung on the grass, her fingers separating the clinging thread-like roots and her small arched foot tamping down the soil about them. Her hair — the color of wet raw wood in the sunlight — was very near the brown head and sometimes their fingers touched over the work. Once, as they stood up, flushed with the exercise, a great black and orange butterfly, dazed with the sun-glow, alighted on Valiant's rolled-up sleeve. He held his arm perfectly still and blew gently on the wavering pinions till it swam away. When a redbird flirted by, to his delight she whistled its call so perfectly that it wheeled in mid-flight and tilted inquiringly back toward them.

As they descended the terrace again to the pergola, he said, "There's only one thing lacking at Damory Court — a sun-dial."

"Then you haven't found it?" she cried delightedly. "Come and let me show you."

She led the way through the maze of beds at one side till they reached a hedge laced thickly with Virginia creeper. He parted this leafy screen, bend-

ing back the springing fronds that thrust against the flimsy muslin of her gown and threatened to spear the pink-rosed hat that cast an adorable warm tint over her creamy face, thinking that never had the old place seen such a picture as she made framed in the deep green.

Some such thought was in the major's mind, too, as he came slowly up the terrace below. He paused, to take off his hat and wipe his brow.

"With the place all fixed up this way," he sighed to himself, "I could believe it was only last week that Beauty Valiant and Southall and I were boys, loafing around this gyarden. And to think that now it's Valiant's son and Judith's daughter! Why, it seems like yesterday that Shirley there was only knee-high to a grasshopper — and I used to tell her her hair was that color because she ran through hell bareheaded. I'm about a thousand years old, I reckon!"

Meanwhile the two figures above had pushed through the tangle into a circular sunny space where stood a short round pillar of red onyx. It was a sun-dial, its vine-clad disk cut of gray polished stone in which its metal tongue was socketed. Round the outer edge of the disk ran an inscription in archaic lettering. Valiant pulled away the clustering ivy leaves and read: *I count no hours but the happy ones.*

"If that had only been true!" he said.

"It is true. See how the vines hid the sun from it. It ceased to mark the time after the Court was deserted."

He snapped the clinging tendrils and swept the cluster from its stone face. "It shall begin to count again from this moment. Will it mark only happy hours for me, I wonder? I'll bribe it with flowers."

"White for happiness," she said.

"I'll put moonflowers at its base and where you are standing, Madonna lilies. The outer part of the circle shall have bridal-wreath and white irises, and they shall shade out into pastel colors — mauves and grays and heliotropes. Oh, I shall love this spot! — perhaps sometime the best of all."

"Which do you love the most now?"

He leaned slightly toward her, one hand on the dial's time-notched rim. "Don't you know?" he said in a lower voice. "Could any other spot mean to me what that acre under the hemlocks means?"

Her face was turned from him, her fingers pulling at the drifting vine, and a splinter of sunlight tangled in her hair like a lace of fireflies.

"I could never forget it," he continued. "The thing that spoiled my father's life happened there, yet there we two first talked, and there you —"

"Don't!" she said, facing him. "Don't!"

"Ah, let me speak! I want to tell you that I shall carry the memory of that afternoon, and of your brave kindness, always, always! If I were

never to see you again in this life, I should always treasure it. If I died of thirst in some Sahara, it would be the last thing I should remember — your face would be the last thing I should see! If I —"

He paused, his veins beating hard under the savage self-repression, his hand trembling against the stone, his voice a traitor, yielding to something that rose in his throat to choke the stumbling words.

In the silence there was the sound of a slow footfall on the gravel walk, and at the same moment he saw a magical change. Shirley drew back. The soft gentian blue of her eyes darkened. The lips that an instant before had been tremulous, parted in a low delicious laugh. She swept him a deep curtsey.

"I am beholden to you, sir," she said gaily, "for a most knightly compliment. There's the major. Come and let us show him where we've planted the ramblers."

CHAPTER XXXI

TOURNAMENT DAY

THE noon sun of tournament day shone brilliantly over the village, drowsy no longer, for many vehicles were hitched at the curb, or moved leisurely along the leafy street: big, canvas-topped country wagons drawn by shaggy-hoofed horses and set with chairs that had bumped and jostled their holiday loads from outlying tobacco plantation and stud-farm; sober, black-covered buggies, long, narrow, springless buckboards, frivolous side-bar runabouts and antique shays resurrected from the primeval depths of cobwebbed stables, relics of tarnished grandeur and faded fortune. Here and there a motor crept, a bilious and replete beetle among insects of wider wing. Knots of high-booted men conversed on street corners, men handcuffed, it would seem, to their whips; children romped and ran hither and thither; and through all sifted a varicolored stream of negroes, male and female, good-natured and voluble. For tournament day was a county event, and the annual sport

of the quality had long outstripped even circus day in general popularity.

At midday vehicles resolved themselves into luncheon-booths — hampers stowed away beneath the seats, disclosing all manner of picnic edibles — the court-house yard was an array of grass-spread table-cloths, and an air of plenty reigned.

Within Mrs. Merryweather Mason's brown house hospitality sat enthroned and the generous dining-room was held by a regiment of feminine out-of-town acquaintances. At intervals Aunt Charity, the cook, issued from the kitchen to peer surreptitiously through the dining-room door with vast delight.

"Dey cert'n'y do take ahtah dat fried chick'n," she said to old Jereboam, who, with a half-dozen extras, had been pressed into perspiring tray-service. "Dey got all de Mefodis' preachahs Ah evah see laid in de shade dis day. Hyuh! hyuh!"

"'Deed dey has! Hyuh! hyuh!" echoed Jereboam huskily.

The Mason yard, an hour later, was an active encampment of rocking-chairs, and a din of conversation floated out over the pink oleanders, whose tubs had achieved a fresh coat of bright green paint for the occasion. Mrs. Poly Gifford — a guest of the day — here shone resplendent.

"The young folks are counting mightily on the dance to-night," observed Mrs. Livy Stowe of

Seven Oaks. "Even the Buckner girls have got new ball dresses."

"Improvident, *I* call it," said Mrs. Gifford. "They can't afford such things, with Park Hill mortgaged up to the roof the way it is."

Mrs. Mason's soft apologetic alto interposed. "They're sweet girls, and we're never young but once. I think it was so fine of Mr. Valiant to offer to give the ball. I hear he's motored to Charlottesville three or four times for fixings, though I understand he's poor enough since he gave up his money as he did. What a princely act that was!"

"Ye-e-es," agreed Mrs. Gifford, "but a little — what shall I call it? — precipitous! If I were married to a man like that I should always be in terror of his adopting an orphan asylum or turning Republican or something equally impossible."

"He's good-looking enough for most girls to be willing to risk it," returned Mrs. Stowe, "to say nothing of a widow or two I might mention," she added cryptically.

"I *believe* you!" said Mrs. Gifford with emphasis. "We all know who you mean. Why any woman can't be satisfied with having had *one* husband, I can't see."

The other pursed her lips. "I know some women with live husbands, for that matter," she said, "who, if the truth were told, aren't either. It's lucky

there's no marriage in heaven or there'd be a precious mix-up before they got through with it!"

"Well," Mrs. Gifford rejoined, "the Bible may say there's no marriage or giving in marriage in heaven, but if I see Poly there, I'll say to them, 'Look here. That's *mine,* and all you women angels keep your wings off him!'"

The listening phalanx relaxed in smiles. Presently Mrs. Mason said:

"I was at Miss Mattie Sue's the other day. Mr. Valiant had just called on her. She was tremendously pleased. She said he was the living image of his father."

"Oh, it never *occurred* to me," cried Mrs. Gifford, in some excitement, "that she might be able to guess who the woman was at the bottom of that old duel. But Miss Mattie Sue is so ever*lastingly* close-mouthed," she added, with an aggravated sigh. "She never lets out anything. Why, I've been trying for *years* to find out how old she is. In the winter — when she was so sick, you know — I went to see her one day, and I said: 'Now, Miss Mattie Sue, you know you're pretty sick. Not that I think you're going to die, but one never knows. And if the Lord *should* see fit to call you, I know you would want everything to be done right. I was thinking,' I said, 'of the stone, for I know the ladies of the church would want to do something nice. Now *don't* you feel like giving me a few little de-

tails — the date you were born, for instance?' I thought I'd find out then, but I didn't. She turned her head on the pillow and says she, 'It's mighty thoughtful of you, Mrs. Gifford, but I like simplicity. Just put on my tombstone "Here lies Mattie Sue Mabry. Born a virgin, died a virgin."'"

The doctor shut his office door with a vicious slam and from the vantage of the wire window-screen looked sourly across the beds of marigold and nasturtium.

"I reckon if Mrs. Poly Gifford shut her mouth more than ten minutes hand-running," he said malevolently, "the top of her head'd fly from here to Charlottesville. What on earth can they find to gabble about? They've been at it since ten o'clock!"

The major, ensconced with a cigar in the easy chair behind him, flourished his palm-leaf fan and smote an errant fly. He was in gayest plumage. His fine white waistcoat was a miracle, his spats a pattern, and the pink in his button-hole had a Beau Brummelish air which many a youthful gallant was to envy him ere the day was done.

"Speaking of Damory Court," he said in his big voice. "The dance idea was a happy thought of young Valiant's. I'll be surprised if he doesn't do it to the queen's taste."

The doctor nodded. "This place can't teach him

much about such folderolings, I reckon. He's led more cotillions than I've got hairs on my head."

"I'd hardly limit it to that," said the major, chortling at the easy thrust. "And after all, even folderolings have their use."

"Who said they hadn't? If people choose to make whirling dervishes of themselves, they at least can reflect that it's better for their livers than cane-bottom chairs. Though that's about all you can say in favor of the modern ball."

"Pshaw!" said the major. "I remember a time when you used to rig out in a claw-hammer and

> "'Dance all night till broad daylight
> And go home with the gyrls in the morning,'

with the bravest of us. Used to like it, too."

"I got over it before I was old enough to make myself a butt of hilarity," the doctor retorted. "I see by the papers they've invented a new dance called the grizzly bear. I believe there's another named the yip-kyoodle. I hope you've got 'em down pat to show the young folks to-night, Bristow."

The major got up with some irritation. "Southall," he said, "sometimes I'm tempted to think your remarks verge upon the personal. You don't have to watch me dance if you don't choose to."

"No, thank God," muttered the doctor. "I pre-

fer to remember you when you still preserved a trace of dignity — twenty odd years ago."

"If dignity —" the major's blood was rising now, —"consists in your eternal tasteless bickerings, I want none of it. What on earth do you do it for? You had some friends once."

"Friends!" snapped the other, "the fewer I have the better!"

The major clapped on his straw hat angrily, strode to the door, and opened it. But on the threshold he stopped, and presently shut it, turned back slowly and resumed his chair. The doctor was relighting his cigar, but an odd furtive look had slipped to his face, and the hand that struck the match was unsteady.

For a time both sat smoking, at first in silence, then talking in a desultory way on indifferent topics. Finally the major rose and tossed his cigar into the empty grate.

"I'll be off now," he said. "I must be on the field before the others."

As he went down the steps a carriage, drawn by a pair of dancing grays, plunged past. "Who are those people with the Chalmers, I wonder," said the doctor. "They're strangers here."

The major peered. "Oh," he said, over his shoulder, "I forgot to tell you. That's Silas Fargo, the railroad president from New York, and his daughter Katharine. His private car's down

on the siding. They're at the judge's — he's chief counsel for the road in this state. They'll be at the tournament, I reckon. You'll be there, won't you?"

The doctor was putting some phials and instruments into a worn leather bag. "No," he said, shortly. "I'm going to take a ten-mile drive — to add to this county's population, I expect. But I'm coming to the dance. Promised Valiant I would in a moment of temporary aberration."

CHAPTER XXXII

A VIRGINIAN RUNNYMEDE

"JUNE in Virginia is something to remember." To-day the master of Damory Court deemed this a true saying. For the air was like wine, and the drifting white wings of cloud, piled above the amethystine ramparts of the far Blue Ridge, looked down upon a violet world bound in green and silver.

In his bedroom Valiant stood looking into the depths of an ancient wardrobe. Presently he took from a hook a suit of white flannel in which he arrayed himself. Over his soft shirt he knotted a pale gray scarf. The modish white suit and the rolling Panama threw out in fine contrast the keen sun-tanned face and dark brown eyes.

In the hall below he looked about him with satisfaction. For the last three days he had labored tirelessly to fit the place for the evening's event. The parlor now showed walls rimmed with straight-back chairs and the grand piano — long ago put in order — had been relegated to the library. That instinct for the artistic, which had made him a last resort in the vexing problems of club entertainments, had aided him in the Court's adornment.

Thick branches of holly, axed from the hollows by Uncle Jefferson, lined the balustrade of the stairway, the burnished green of ivy leaves was twined with the prisms of the chandelier in the big yellow-hung parlor, and bands of twisted laurel were festooned along the upper walls. The massed green was a setting for a prodigal use of flowers. Everywhere wild blossoms showed their spreading clusters, and he had searched every corner of the estate, even climbing the ragged forest slope, to the tawdry edge of Hell's Half-Acre, to plunder each covert of its hidden blooms.

He had intended at first to use only the wild flowers, but that morning Ranston had arrived from Rosewood with a load of red roses that had made him gasp with delight. Now these painted the whole a splendid riotous crimson. They stood banked in windows and fireplaces. Great clumps nodded from shadowed corners and a veritable bower of them waited for the musicians at the end of the hall. Through the whole house wreathed the sweet rose-scent, mingled with the frailer fragrance of the wildings. John Valiant drew a single great red beauty from its brethren and fastened it in his button-hole.

Out in the kitchens Cassandra's egg-beating clattered like a watchman's rattle, while Aunt Daphne put the finishing touches to an array of lighter edibles destined to grace the long table on

the rear porch, now walled in with snow-white muslin and hung with candle-lusters. Under the trees Uncle Jefferson was even then experimenting with various punch compounds, and a delicious aroma of vanilla came to Valiant's nostrils together with Aunt Daphne's wrathful voice:

"Heah, yo' Greenie Simms! Whah yo' gwine?"

"Ain' gwine nowhah. Ah's done been whah Ah's gwine."

"Yo' set down dat o'ange er Ah'll smack yo' bardaciously ovah! Ef yo' *steals,* what gwineter become ob yo' *soul?*"

"Don' know nuffin' 'bout mah soul," responded the ebony materialist. "But Ah knows Ah got er body, 'cause Ah buttons et up e'vy day, en Ah lakes et plump."

"Yo' go back en wuk fo' yo' quahtah yankin' on dat ar ice-cream freezah," decreed Aunt Daphne exasperatedly, "er yo' don' git er *smell* ter-night. Yo' heah dat!"

The threat proved efficacious, for Greenie, muttering sullenly that she "didn' nebbah feel no skylark in de ebenin'," returned to her labors.

The Red Road, as Valiant's car passed, was dotted with straggling pedestrians: humble country folk who trudged along the grassy foot-path with no sullen regard for the swift cars and comfortable carriages that left them behind; sturdy barefooted

children who called shrilly after him, and happy-go-lucky negro youths clad in their best with Sunday shoes dangling over their shoulders, slouching regardlessly in the dust — all bound for the same Mecca, which presently rose before him, a gateway of painted canvas proclaiming the field to which it opened Runnymede.

This was a spacious level meadow into which debouched the ravine on whose rim he had stood with Shirley on that unforgettable day. But its stake-and-ridered fence enclosed now no mere stretch of ill-kept sward. Busy scythes, rollers and grass-cutters from the Country Club had smoothed and shaven a rectangle in its center till it lay like a carpet of crushed green velvet, set in an expanse of life-everlasting and pale budding goldenrod.

He halted his car at the end of the field and snapped a leash in the bulldog's collar. "I hate to do it, old man," he said apologetically to Chum's reproachful look, "but I've got to. There are to be some stunts, and in such occasions you're apt to be convinced you're the main one of the contestants, which might cause a mix-up. Never mind; I'll anchor you where you won't miss anything."

With the excited dog tugging before him, he threaded his way through the press with keen exhilaration. This was not a crowd like that of a city; rather it resembled the old-homestead day of some unbelievably populous family, at reunion with

its servants and retainers. All its members knew one another and the air was musical with badinage. Now and then his gloved hand touched his cap at a salutation. He was conscious of swift bird-like glances from pretty girls. Here was none of the rigid straight-ahead gaze or vacant stare of the city boulevard; the eyes that looked at him, frankly curious and inquiring, were full of easy open comradeship. There was about both men and women an air of being at the same time more ceremonious and more casual than those he had known. Some of the girls wore gowns and hats that might that morning have issued from the Rue de la Paix; others were habited in cheap materials. But about the latter hung no benumbing self-consciousness. All bore themselves alike. And all seemed to possess musical voices, graceful movements and a sense of quiet dignity. He was beginning to realize that there might really exist straitened circumstances, even actual poverty, which yet created no sort of social difference.

Opposite the canvas-covered grand stand sat twelve small mushroom tents, each with a staff and tiny flag. Midway lines of flaxen ropes stretched between rows of slender peeled saplings from whose tops floated fanged streamers of vivid bunting. A pavilion of purple cloth, open at the sides, awaited the committee, and near the center, a negro band was disposed on camp-stools, the brass of the

waiting instruments winking in the sunlight. The stand was a confused glow of color, of light gauzy dresses, of young girls in pastel muslins with flowers in their belts, picturesque hats and slender articulate hands darting in vivacious gestures like white swallows — the gentry from the "big houses." About the square babbled and palpitated the crowd of the farm-wagon and carry-all; and at the lower end, jostling, laughing and skylarking beyond the barrier, a picturesque block of negroes, picked out by flashing white teeth, red bandannas folded above wrinkled countenances and garish knots of ribbon flaunting above the pert yellow faces of a younger mulatto race.

The light athletic figure, towed by the white bulldog, drew many glances. Valiant's eyes, however, as they swept the seats, were looking for but one, and at first vainly. He felt a quick pang of disappointment. Perhaps she would not come! Perhaps her mother was still ill. Perhaps — but then suddenly his heart beat high, for he saw her in the lower tier, with a group of young people. He could not have told what she wore, save that it was of soft Murillo blue with a hat whose down-curved brim was wound with a shaded plume of the same tint. Her mother was not with her. She was not looking his way as he passed — her arms at the moment being held out in an adorable gesture toward a little child in a smiling matron's lap — and

but a single glance was vouchsafed him before the major seized upon him and bore him to the purple pavilion, for he was one of the committee.

But for this distraction, he might have seen, entering the stand with the Chalmers just as the band struck up a delirious whirl of *Dixie,* the two strangers whom the doctor had observed an hour before as they whirled by the Merryweather Mason house behind the judge's grays. Silas Fargo might have passed in any gathering for the unobtrusive city man. Katharine was noticeable anywhere, and to-day her tall willowy figure in its champagne-color lingerie gown and hat garnished with bronze and gold thistles, setting in relief her ivory statuesque face, drew a wave of whispered comment which left a sibilant wake behind them. The party made a picturesque group as they now disposed themselves, Katharine's colorless loveliness contrasting with the eager sparkle of pretty Nancy Chalmers and the gipsy-like beauty of Betty Page.

"You call it a tournament, don't you?" asked Katharine of the judge.

"Yes," he replied. "It's a kind of contest in which twelve riders compete for the privilege of naming a Queen of Beauty. There's a ball to-night, at which the lucky lady is crowned. Those little tents are where the noble knights don their shining armor. See, there go their caparisoned chargers."

A file of negroes was approaching the tents, each leading a horse whose saddle and bridle were decorated with fringes of various hues. In the center of the roped lists, directly in front of the stand, others were planting upright in the ground a tall pole from whose top projected a horizontal arm like a slender gallows. From this was suspended a cord at whose end swung a tiny object that whirled and glittered in the sun.

The judge explained. "On the end of the cord is a silver ring, at which the knights tilt with lances. Twelve rings are used. The pike-points are made to fit them, and the knight who carries off the greatest number of the twelve is the victor. The whole thing is a custom as ancient as Virginia —a relic, of course, of the old jousting of the feudal ages. The ring is supposed to represent the device on the boss of the shield, at which the lance-thrust was aimed."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Katharine, and turning, swept the stand with her lorgnette. "I suppose all the county's F. F. V's. are here," she said laughingly to Nancy Chalmers. "I've often wondered, by the way, what became of the Second Families of Virginia."

"Oh, they've mostly emigrated North," answered Nancy. "The ones that are left are all ancient. There are families here that don't admit they ever began at all."

Silas Fargo shook his stooped shoulders with laughter. "Up North," he said genially "we've got regular factories that turn out ready-made family-trees for anybody who wants to roost in one."

Betty Page turned her piquant brown face toward him reflectively. "Ah do think you No'therners are wonderful," she said in her languorous Carolinian, "at being just what you want to be! Ah met a No'thern gyrl once at White Sulphur Springs who said such clever things, and Ah asked her, 'How did you ever learn to talk like you do?' What do you reckon the gyrl said? She said she had to be clever because her nose was so big. She tried wearing tricky little hats and a follow-me-in-the-twilight expression, but it made her seem ridiculous, so she finally thought of brains and epigrams, and took to reading Bernard Shaw and Walter Pater, and it worked fine. She said trouble suited her profile, and she'd discovered people looked twice at sad eyes, so she'd cultivated a pensive look for yeahs. Ah think that was mighty bright! Down South we're too lazy to work over ourselves that way."

And now over the fluttering stand and the crowd about the barriers, a stir was discernible. Katharine looked again at the field. "Who is that splendid big old man giving directions? The one who looks like a lion. He's coming this way now."

"That's Major Montague Bristow," said the judge. "He's been master of the heralds for years. The tournament could hardly happen without the major."

"I'm sure I'd like him," she answered. "What a lovely girl he is talking to!"

It was Shirley who had beckoned the major from the lists. She was leaning over the railing. "Why has Ridgeley Pendleton left?" she asked in a low voice. "Isn't he one of the twelve?"

"He was. But he's ill. He wasn't feeling up to it when he came, but he didn't give up till half an hour ago. We'll have to get along with eleven knights."

She made an exclamation of dismay. "Poor Ridge! And what a pity! There have never been less than the full number. It will spoil the royal quadrille to-night, too. Why doesn't the committee choose some one in his place?"

"Too late. Besides, he would have no costume."

"Surely that's not so important as filling the Round Table?"

"It's too bad. But I'm afraid it can't be helped."

She bent still closer. "Listen. Why not ask Mr. Valiant? He is our host to-night. I'm sure he'd be glad to help out, even without the costume."

"Egad!" he said, pulling his imperial. "None of us had thought of him. He could ride Pendleton's mount, of course." He reflected a moment.

"I'll do it. Its exactly the right thing. You're a clever girl, Shirley."

He hastily crossed the field, while she leaned back, her eyes on the flanneled figure — long since recognized — under the purple pavilion. She saw the committee put their heads together and hurriedly enter.

In the moment's wait, Shirley's gloved fingers clasped and unclasped somewhat nervously. The riders had been chosen long before John Valiant's coming. If a saddle, however, was perforce to be vacant, what more appropriate than that he should fill it? The thought had come to her instantly, bred of an underlying regret, which she had all along cherished, that he was not to take part. But beneath this was a deeper passionate wish that she did not attempt to analyze, to see him assume his place with others long habituated to that closed circle — a place rightfully his by reason of birth and name — and to lighten the gloomy shadow, that must rest on his thoughts of his father, with warmer sunnier things. She heaved a secret sigh of satisfaction as the white-clad figure rose in acquiescence.

The major returned to the grand stand and held up his hand for silence.

"Our gracious Liege," he proclaimed, in his big vibrant voice, "Queen of Beauty yet unknown, Lords, Knights and Esquires, Fair Dames and gentles all! Whereas divers noble persons have en-

terprized and taken upon them to hold jousts royal and tourney, you are hereby acquainted that the lists of Runnymede are about to open for that achievement of arms and grand and noble tournament for which they have so long been famed. But an hour since one of our noble knights, pricking hither to tilt for his lady, was beset by a grievous malady. However, lest our jousting lack the royal number, a new champion hath at this last hour been found to fill the Table Round, who of his courtesy doth consent to ride without armor."

A buzz ran over the assemblage. "It must be Pendleton who has defaulted," said Judge Chalmers. "I heard this morning he was sick. Who's the substitute knight, I wonder?"

At the moment a single mounted herald before the tents blew a long blast on a silver horn. Their flaps parted and eleven knights issued to mount their steeds and draw into line behind him. They were brilliantly decked in fleshlings with slashed doublets and plumed chapeaus, and short jeweled cloaks drooped from their shoulders. Pages handed each a long lance which was held perpendicular, the butt resting on the right stirrup.

"Why," cried Katharine, "it's like a bit out of the medieval pageant at Earl's Court! Where do you get the costumes?"

"Some we make," Judge Chalmers answered, "but a few are the real thing — so old they have

to be patched up anew each year. The ancient lances have disappeared. The pikes we use now were found in '61, hidden ready for the negro insurrection, when John Brown should give the signal."

Under the pavilion, just for the fraction of a second, Valiant hesitated. Then he turned swiftly to the twelfth tent. Its flag-staff bore a long streamer of deep blood-red. He snatched this from its place, flung it about his waist and knotted it sash-wise. He drew the rose from his lapel and thrust it through the band of his Panama, leaped to the saddle of the horse the major had beckoned, and with a quick thrust of his heel, swung to the end of the stamping line.

The field and grand stand had seen the quick decision, with its instant action, and as the hoofs thudded over the turf, a wave of hand-clapping ran across the seats like a silver rain. "Neatly done, upon my word!" said the judge, delighted. "What a daring idea! Who is it? Is it — bless my soul, it is!"

Katharine Fargo had dropped her lorgnette with an exclamation. She stood up, her wide eyes fixed on that figure in pure white, with the blood-red cordon flaunting across his horse's flanks and the single crimson blossom glowing in his hat.

"The White Knight!" she breathed. "Who is he?"

Judge Chalmers looked round in sudden illumination. "I forgot that you would be likely to know him," he said. "That is Mr. John Valiant of Damory Court."

CHAPER XXXIII

THE KNIGHT OF THE CRIMSON ROSE

THE row of horsemen had halted in a curving line before the grand stand, and now in the silence the herald, holding a parchment scroll, spurred before each rider in turn, demanding his title. As this was given he whirled to proclaim it, accompanying each evolution with a blast on his horn. "Knight of the Golden Spur," "Knight of Castlewood," "Lord of Brandon," "Westover's Knight," "Knight of the Silver Cross": the names, fanciful, or those of family estates, fell on John Valiant's ear with a pungent flavor of medievalism. His eyes, full of the swaying crowd, the shift and shimmer of light and color, returned again and again to an alluring spot of blue at one side, which might for him have been the heart of the whole festal out-of-doors. He started as he became aware that the rider next him had answered and that the herald had paused before him.

"Knight of the Crimson Rose!" It sprang to his lips without forethought, an echo, perhaps, of the improvised sash and the flower in his hat-band, but the shout of the herald and the trumpet's blare

seemed to make the words fairly bulge with inevitability. And through this struck a sudden appalled feeling that he had really spoken Shirley's name, and that every one had heard. He could not see her face, and clutched his lance fiercely to overcome an insane desire to stoop hideously in his saddle and peer under the shading hat-brim. Lest he should do this, he fastened his eyes determinedly on the major, who now proceeded to deliver himself of the "Charge to the Knights."

The major made an appealing center to the charming picture as he stood on the green turf, "the glass of fashion and the mold of form," his head bare, his shock of blond-gray hair thrown back, and one hand thrust between the buttons of his snowy waistcoat. His rich bass voice rolled out to the farthest corner of the field:

"Sir Knights!

"The tournament to which we are gathered today is to us traditional; a rite of antiquity and a monument of ancient generations. This relic of the jousts of the Field of the Cloth-of-Gold points us back to an era of knightly deeds, fidelity to sacred trust, obligation to duty and loyalty to woman — the watchwords of true knighthood.

"We like to think that when our forefathers, offspring of men who established chivalry, came from over-seas, they brought with them not only this ancient play, but the precepts it symbolizes. We may

be proud, indeed, knowing that this is no hollow ceremonial, but an earnest that the flower of knighthood has not withered in the world, that in an age when the greed of gold was never so dazzling, the spirit of true gallantry has not faded but blooms luxuriant in the sparkling dews of the heart of this commonwealth.

"Yours is no bitter ride by haunted tarn or through enchanted forest — no arrowed vigil on beleagered walls. You go not in gleaming steel and fretted mail to meet the bite of blade and crash of battle-ax. Yet is your trial one of honor and glory. I charge you that in the contest there be no darkling envy for the victor, but only true comradeship and that generosity which is the badge of noble minds.

"I summon you to bow the knee loyally before your queen. For as the contest typifies life's battle, so shall she stand for you as the type of womanhood, the crown of knighthood. The bravest thoughts of chivalry circle about her. The stars of heaven only may be above her head, the glowworm in the night-chill grasses the only fire at her feet; still the spot that holds her is richer than if ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion, and sheds a light far for him who else were lampless.

"Most Noble Knights! In the name of that high tradition which this day preserves! In the memory of those other knights who practised the tourney

in its old-time glory! In the sight of your Queen of Beauty! I charge you, Southern gentlemen, to joust with that valor, fairness and truth which are the enduring glories of the knighthood of Virginia!"

Over the ringing applause Nancy Chalmers looked at him with a little smile, quizzical yet soft. "Dear old major!" she whispered to Betty Page. "How he loves the center of the stage! And he's effective, too. Thirty years ago, father says, he might have been anything he wanted to — even United States Senator. But he would never leave the state. Not that I blame him for that," she added; "I'd rather be a church-mouse in Virginia than Crœsus' daughter anywhere else."

The twelve horsemen were now sitting their restive mounts in a group at one end of the lists. Two mounted monitors had stationed themselves on either side of the rope-barrier; a third stood behind the upright from whose arm was suspended the silver ring. The herald blew a blast, calling the title of the first of the knights. Instantly, with lance at rest, the latter galloped at full speed down the lists. There was a sharp musical clash, and as he dashed on, the ring flew the full length of its tether and swung back, whirling swiftly. It had been a close thrust, for the iron pike-point had smitten its rim. A cheer went up, under cover of

which the rider looped back outside the lists to his former position.

In an upper tier of the stand a spectator made a cup of his hands. "The Knight of the Golden Spur against the field," he called. "What odds?"

"Five to one, Spotteswood," a voice answered.

"Ten dollars," announced the first.

"Good." And both made memorandum on their cuffs.

A second time the trumpet sounded, and the Knight of Castlewood flashed ingloriously down the roped aisle — a miss.

Again and again the clear note rang out and a mounted figure plunged by, and presently, in a burst of cheering, the herald proclaimed "The Knight of the Black Eagle — one!" and Chilly Lusk, in old-rose doublet and inky plume cantered back with a silver ring upon his pike.

The hazards in the stand multiplied. Now it was Westover's Knight against him of the Silver Cross; now, the Lord of Brandon to win. The gentlemen wagered coin of the realm; the ladies gloves and chocolates. One pretty girl, amid a gale of chaff, staked a greyhound puppy. The arena swam in a lustrous light, and the greensward glistened in its frame of white and dusky spectators. In the sunshine the horses — every one of them groomed till his coat shone like black, gray or sorrel

satin — curveted and whinnied, restive and red-nostriled under the tense rein. The riders sat erect and statuesque, pikes in air, cloaks flapping from their shoulders, waiting the call that sent each in turn tilting against the glittering and elusively breeze-swinging silver circlet.

No simple thing, approaching leisurely and afoot, to send that tapering point straight to the tiny mark. But at headlong gallop, astride a blooded horse straining to take the bit, a deed requiring a nice eye, a perfect seat and an unwavering arm and hand! Those knights who looped back with their pikes thus braceleted had spent long hours in practise and each rode as naturally as he breathed; yet more than once a horse shied in mid-course and at the too-eager thrust of the spur bolted through the ropes. Valiant made his first essay — and missed — with the blood singing in his ears. The ring flew from his pike, catching him a swinging blow on the temple in its rebound, but he scarcely felt it. As he cantered back he heard the major's bass pitting him against the field, and for a moment again the spot of blue seemed to spread over all the watching stand.

And then, suddenly, stand and field all vanished. He saw only the long level rope-lined lane with its twinkling mid-air point. An exhilaration caught him at the feel of the splendid horse-flesh beneath him — that sense of oneness with the creature he

bestrode which the instinctive horseman knows. He lifted his lance and hefted it, seeking its absolute balance, feeling its point as a fencer with his rapier. When again the blood-red sash streamed away the herald's cry, "Knight of the Crimson Rose — One!" set the field hand-clapping. From the next joust also, Valiant returned with the gage upon his lance. Two had gone to the Champion of Castlewood and two to scattering riders. When Valiant won his fourth the grand stand thundered with applause.

Katherine Fargo was watching with a gaze that held a curious puzzle. After that recognition of the White Knight, Judge Chalmers had told in a few words the story of Damory Court, its ancient history, the unhappy duel that had sent its owner into a Northern exile, and the son's recent coming. It had more than surprised her. Her father's appreciative chuckle that "the young vagabond seemed after all to have fallen on his feet" had left her strangely silent. She was undergoing a curious mental bouleversement. Valiant's passionate defense of his father in that fierce burst of anger in the court room had at first startled her with its sense of unsuspected force. Later, however, she had come to think it theatric and overdrawn, and she had heard of his quixotic surrender of his fortune with a wonder not unmixed with an almost pitying scorn. She despised eccentricity as much

as she respected wealth, and the act had seemed a ridiculous impulse or a silly affectation, destined to be repented long and bitterly in cold blood. So she had thought of him since his evanishment with a regret less sharp for being glozed with a certain contempt.

The discovery of him to-day had dissipated this. She had an unerring sense of social values and she made no error in her estimate of the people by whom she was now surrounded. The recital of the Valiant generations, the size of the estate, the position into which its heir had stepped by very reason of being who he was, appealed to her instinct and imagination and respect for blood. She had a sudden conception of new values, beside which money counted little. The last of a line more ancient than the state itself, master of a homestead famous throughout its borders, John Valiant loomed larger in her eyes at the moment than ever before.

The trumpet again pealed its silvery proclamation. Judge Chalmers was on his feet. "Fifty to ten on the Crimson Rose," he cried. This time, however, there were no takers. He called again, but none heard him; the last tilts were too absorbing.

Where had John Valiant learned that trick of the loose wrist and inflexible thrust, but at the fencing club? Where that subconscious management of the rein, that nice gage of speed and distance, but on the polo field? The old sports stood him now

in good stead. "Why, he has a seat like a centaur!" exclaimed the judge — praise indeed in a community where riding was a passion and horseflesh a fetish!

"Oh, dear!" mourned Nancy Chalmers. "I've bet six pairs of gloves on Quint Carter. Never mind; if it has to be anybody else, I'd rather it were Mr. Valiant. It's about time Damory Court got something after Rip-Van-Winkling it for thirty years. Besides, he's giving us the dance, and I *love* him for that! Quint still has a chance, though. If he takes the next two, and Mr. Valiant misses —"

Katherine looked at her with a little smile. "He won't miss," she said.

She had seen that look on his face before and read it aright. John Valiant had striven in many contests, not only of skill but of strength and daring, before crowded grand stands. But never in all his life had he so desired to pluck the prize. His grip was tense on the lance as the yellow doublet and olive plume of Castlewood shot away for a last time — and failed. An instant later the Knight of the Crimson Rose flashed down the lists with the last ring on his pike.

And the tourney was won.

In the shouting and hand-clapping Valiant took the rose from his hat-band and bound it with a shred of his sash to his lance-point. As he rode slowly toward the massed stand, the whole field was so still

that he could hear the hoofs of the file of knights behind him. The people were on their feet.

The mounted herald blew his blast. "By the Majesties of St. Michael and St. George," he proclaimed, "I declare the Knight of the Crimson Rose the victor of this our tourney, and do charge him now to choose his Queen of Beauty, that all may do her homage!"

Shirley saw the horse coming down the line, its rider bareheaded now, and her heart began to race wildly. Beyond wanting him to take part, she had not thought. She looked about her, suddenly dismayed. People were smiling at her and clapping their hands. From the other end of the stand she saw Nancy Chalmers throwing her a kiss, and beside her a tall pale girl in champagne-color staring through a jeweled lorgnette.

She was conscious all at once that the flanneled rider was very close . . . that his pike-point, with its big red blossom, was stretching up to her.

With the rose in her hand she curtsied to him, while the blurred throng cheered itself hoarse, and the band struck up *You Great Big Beautiful Doll,* with extraordinary rapture, to the tune of which the noise finally subsided to a battery of hilarious congratulations which left her flushed and a little breathless. Nancy Chalmers and Betty Page had burst upon her like petticoated whirlwinds and pres-

ently, when the crowd had lessened, the judge came to introduce his visitor.

"Mr. Fargo and his daughter are our guests at Gladden Hall," he told her. "They are old friends of Valiant's, by the way; they knew him in New York."

"Katharine's lighting her incense now, I guess," observed Silas Fargo. "See there!" He pointed across the stand, where stood a willowy tan figure, one hand beckoning to the concourse below, where Valiant stood, the center of a shifting group, round which the white bulldog, mad with recovered liberty, tore in eccentric circles.

As they looked, she called softly, "John! John!"

Shirley saw him start and face about, then come quickly toward her, amazement and welcome in his eyes.

As Shirley turned away a little later with the major, that whispering voice seemed still to sound in her ears—"John! John!" There smote her suddenly the thought that when he had chosen her his Queen of Beauty, he had not seen the other—had not known she was there.

A few moments before the day had been golden; she went home through a landscape that somehow seemed to have lost its brightest glow.

CHAPTER XXXIV

KATHARINE DECIDES

KATHARINE left the field of Runnymede with John Valiant in the dun-colored motor. She sat in the driver's seat beside him, while the bulldog capered, ecstatically barking, from side to side of the rear cushions. Her father had declined the honor, remarking that he considered a professional chauffeur a sufficient risk of his valuable life and that the Chalmers' grays were good enough for him — a decision which did not wholly displease Katharine.

The car was not the smart Panhard in which she had so often spun down the avenue or along the shell-roads of the north shore. It lacked those fin-de-siècle appurtenances which marked the ne plus ultra of its kind, as her observant eye recognized; but it ran staunch and true. The powerful hands that gripped the steering-wheel were brown with sun and wind, and the handsome face above it had a look of keenness and energy she had never surprised before. They passed many vehicles and there were few whose occupants did not greet him. In fact, as

he presently remarked, it was a saving of energy to keep his hat off; and he tossed the Panama into the rear seat. On the rim of the village a group raised a cheer to which he nodded laughingly, and farther on a little old lady on a timid vine-covered porch beside a church, waved a black-mitted hand to him with a sweet old-time gesture. Katharine noted that he bowed to her with extra care.

"That's Miss Mattie Sue Mabry," he said, "the quaintest, dearest thing you ever saw. She taught my father his letters." A small freckled-faced girl was swinging on the gate. "You really must know Rickey Snyder!" he said, and halted the car at the curb. "Rickey," he called, "I want to introduce you to Miss Fargo."

"Howdy do?" said Rickey, approaching with an ingratiating bob of the head. "I saw you at the tournament. Is it true that you can ride on the train wherever you want to without ever buying any ticket?"

Katharine smiled back. "I'm not sure they'd all take me for nothing," she said, "but perhaps a few of them would."

"That must be grand," sighed Rickey. "I reckon you've seen everything in the world, almost."

"No, indeed. I never saw a tournament like this, for instance. It was tremendously exciting. Wasn't it!"

"My goodness gracious, yes! Mr. Valiant, I

most cried when you chose Miss Shirley Queen of Beauty, I was that glad! She was a lot the prettiest girl there. Though I like your looks right much too, Miss Fargo," she added tactfully.

"Oh, Mr. Valiant!" Rickey called after them as the car started. "Now you're at Damory Court, are you going to let us children keep on playing up at the Hemlocks?"

"Well I should *think* so!" he answered. "Play there all the time, if you like."

"Oh, thank you," said Rickey, radiant. "And there won't be any snakes there now, for you've cleared all the underbrush away."

As they sped on, Katharine's cheek had a faintly heightened color. But, "What a deliciously odd child!" she laughed.

"She's a character," he said. "She worships the ground Miss Dandridge walks on. There's a good reason for it. You must get Miss Chalmers to tell you the story."

Where the Red Road stretched level before them, he threw the throttle open for a long rush through the thymy-scented air. The light, late afternoon breeze drew by them, sweeping back Katharine's graceful sinuous veil and spraying them with odors of clover and sunny fruit. They passed orchard clumps bending with young apples, boundless aisles of green, young-tasseled corn and shadowy groves

that smelled of fern and sassafras, opening out into more sunlighted vistas overarched by the intense penetrable blue of the June sky.

John Valiant had never seemed to her so wholly good to see, with his waving hair ruffling in their flight and the westerning sun shining redly on his face. Midway of this spurt he looked at her to say: "Did you ever know a more beautiful countryside? See how the pink-and-yellow of those grain fields fades into the purple of the hills. Very few painters have ever captured a tint like that. It's like raspberries crushed in curdled milk."

"I've quite lost my heart to it all," she said, her voice jolting with the speed of their course. "It's a perfect pastoral . . . so different from our terrific city pace. . . . Of course it must be a trifle dull at times . . . seeing the same people always . . . and without the theater and the opera and the whirl about one — but . . . the kind of life one reads about . . . in the novels of the South, you know . . . I suppose one doesn't realize that it actually exists until one comes to a Southern place like this. And the negro servants! How odd it must be to have a white-headed old darky in a brass-buttoned swallow-tail for a butler! So picturesque! At Judge Chalmers, I have a feeling all the time that I'm walking through a stage rehearsal."

The car slackened speed as it slid by a white-

washed cabin at whose entrance sat a dusky gray-bearded figure. Valiant pointed. "Do you see him?" he asked.

"I see a very ordinary old colored man sitting on the door-step," Katharine replied.

"That's Mad Anthony, our local Mother Shipton. He's a prophet and soothsayer. Uncle Jefferson — that's my body-servant — insists that he foretold my coming to Damory Court. If we had more time you could have your fortune told."

"How thrilling!" she commented with half-humorous irony.

He pointed to a great white house set in a grove of trees. "That is Beechwood," he told her, "the Beverley homestead. Young Beverley was the Knight of the Silver Cross. A fine old place, isn't it? It was burned by the Indians during the French and Indian War. My great-great-great-grandfather —" He broke off. "But then, those old things won't interest you."

"They interest you a great deal, don't they?" she asked.

"Yes," he admitted, "they do. You see, my ancestors are such new acquaintances, I find them absorbing. You know when I lived in New York —"

"Last month."

He laughed a little — not quite the laugh she had known in the past. "Yes, but I can hardly believe

it; I seem to have been here half a lifetime. To think that a month ago I was a double-dyed New Yorker."

"It's been a strange experience for you. Don't you feel rather Jekyl-and-Hydish?"

"That's a terrible compound!" he laughed, as he swept the car round a curve, skilfully evading a bumping wagon-load of farm-hands. "In which capacity am I Mr. Hyde, by the way?"

She smiled at him round the edge of her blown veil. "Figures of speech aren't to be analyzed. You are Dr. Jekyl in New York, anyway. You read what the papers said? No? It's just as well; it would have been likely to turn your head."

"Could anything be as likely to do that as — this?" With a glance he indicated her presence beside him.

She made him a mocking bow. "Be careful," she warned. "Speeches like that smack of disloyalty to your queen. What a pretty girl she is! I congratulated you on your prowess. I must add my congratulations on your taste."

He returned her bow of a moment since.

"It was all a most unique thing," she went on. "And to-night at your ball I shall witness the coronation. I can hardly wait to see Damory Court. Do you know, in all these years I never suspected what a versatile genius you were? It's too wonder-

ful how you have stepped into this life — into the people's thoughts and feelings — as you have. When you come back to New York —"

He looked at her, oddly she thought. "Why should I go back?"

"Why? Because it's your natural habitat. Isn't it?"

"That's the word," he said smiling. "It *was* my habitat. This is my home."

She was silent a moment in sheer surprise. She had thought of this Southern essay as a quickly passing incident, a colorful chapter whose page might any day be turned. But it was impossible to mistake his meaning. Clearly, he was deeply infatuated with this Arcadian experience and had no thought at present but to continue it indefinitely.

But it would pass! He was a New Yorker, after all. And what more charming than to have an old place in such a countryside — a position ready-made at one's hand, to step into for a month or two when ennui made the old haunts tasteless? It was worth some cultivation. One must anchor somewhere. Virginia was not so far from the center; splendid estates of Northerners dotted even the Carolinas. Here one might be in hand-touch with everything. And it was no small thing to hold one of the oldest and proudest names in a section like this. One could always have a town-house too — there was Washington, and there was Europe. . . .

They were passing the entrance of a cherry-bordered lane, and without taking his hands from the gear, he nodded toward the low broad-eaved dwelling with its flowering arbors that showed in flashing glimpses of brown and red between the intervening trees. "The palace of the queen!" he said —"Rosewood, by name."

She looked in some curiosity. Clearly, if not a refuge of genteel poverty, neither was it the abode of wealth; so, from her assured rampart of the Fargo millions, Katharine reflected complacently. The girl was a local favorite, of course — he had been tactful as to that. It was fortunate, in a way, that he had not seen her, Katharine, in the grand stand until afterward. Feeling toward her as she believed he did, with his absurd directness, he would have been likely to drop the rose in her lap, never reflecting that, the tourney being a local function, the choice should not fall upon an outlander. That would not have tended to increase his popularity in the countryside, and popularity was the very salt of social success. So Katharine pondered, her mind, like a capable general's, running somewhat ahead of the moment.

The slowing of the car brought her back to the present, and she looked up to see before them the great gate of Gladden Hall. She did not speak till they had quite stopped.

Then, as her hand lay in his for farewell, "You

are right in your decision," she said softly. "This is your place. You are a Valiant of Virginia. I didn't realize it before, but I am beginning to see all it means to you."

Her voice held a lingering indefinable quality that was almost sadness, and for that one slender instant, she opened on him the unmasked batteries of her glorious gray eyes.

CHAPTER XXXV

"WHEN KNIGHTHOOD WAS IN FLOWER"

THE Tournament Ball at Damory Court that night was more than an event. The old mansion was an irresistible magnet. The floor of its yellow parlor was known to be of delectable hugeness. Its gardens were a legend. The whole place, moreover, was steeped in the very odor of old mystery and new romance. Small wonder that to this particular affair the elect — the major was the high custodian of the rolls, his decisions being as the laws of the Medes and Persians — came gaily from the farthest county line, and the big houses of the neighborhood were crammed with over-night guests.

By half past nine o'clock the phalanx of chaperons decreed by old custom had begun to arrive, and the great iron gate at the foot of the drive — erect and rustless now — saw an imposing processional of carriages. These passed up a slope as radiant with the fairy light of paper lanterns as a Japanese thoroughfare in festival season. The colored bulbs swung moon-like from tree and shrub, painting their rainbow lusters on grass and driveway. Under the

high gray columns of the porch and into the wide door, framed in its small leaded panes that glowed with the merry light within, poured a stream of loveliness: in carriage-wraps of light tints, collared and edged with fur or eider, or wide-sleeved mandarin coats falling back from dazzling throats and arms, hair swathed with chiffon against the night dews, and gallantly cavaliered by masculine black and white.

These from their tiring-rooms overflowed presently, garbed like dreams, to make obeisance to the dowagers and then to drift through flower-lined corridors, the foam on recurrent waves of discovery. Behind the rose-bower in the hall, which shielded a dozen colored musicians — violins, cello, guitars and mandolins — came premonitory chirps and shivers, which presently wove into the low and dreamy melody of *Carry me back to old Virginia.* Around the walls of the yellow parlor, chairs stood two deep, occupied, or preempted by fan or gloves or lacy handkerchief. The floor, newly waxed, gleamed in the candle-light like beaten moonbeams. At its farther end was a low dais covered by a thin Persian prayer-rug, where a single great tapestried chair of dull gold waited throne-like, flanked on either side by the chaperons, ladies of honor to the queen to come.

Promptly as the clock in the hall chimed ten, the music merged into a march. Doors on opposite

sides of the upper hall swung wide and down the broad staircase came, with slow step, a stately procession: two heralds in fawn-colored doublets with scroll and trumpets wound with flowers, behind them the Queen of Beauty, her finger-tips resting lightly in the hand of the Knight of the Crimson Rose, and these followed by as brave a concourse of lords and ladies as ever graced castle-hall in the gallant days "when knighthood was in flower."

Shirley's gown was of pure white: her arms were swathed in tulle, crossed with straps of seed-pearl, over which hung long semi-flowing sleeves of satin, and from her shoulders rose a stiff pointed medieval collar of Venetian lace, against whose pale traceries her bronze hair glowed with rosy lights. The edge of the square-cut corsage was powdered with the pearls and against their sheen her breast and neck had the soft creamy ivory of magnolia buds. Her straight plain train of satin, knotted with fresh white rose-buds (Nancy Chalmers had labored for a frantic half-hour in the dressing-room for this effect) was held by the seven-year-old Byloe twins, in beribboned knickerbockers, duly impressed with the grandeur of their privilege and grimly intent on acquitting themselves with glory.

Shirley's face was still touched with the surprise that had swept it as Valiant had stepped to her side. She had looked to see him in the conventional panoply a sober-sided masculine mode decrees.

What she had beheld was a figure that might have stepped out of an Elizabethan picture-frame. He was in deep purple slashed with gold. A cloak of thin crimson velvet narrowly edged with ermine hung from his shoulders, lined with tissue-like cloth-of-gold. From the rolling brim of his hat swept a curling purple plume. He wore a slender dress-sword, and an order set with brilliants sparkled on his breast.

The costume had been one he had worn at a fancy ball of the winter before. It had been made from a painting at Windsor of one of the Dukes of Buckingham, and it made a perfect foil for Shirley's white.

The eleven knights of the tourney, each with his chosen lady, if less splendid, were tricked out in sufficiently gorgeous attire. The Knight of Castlewood was in olive velveteen slashed with yellow, with Nancy Chalmers, in flowered panniers and beaded pompadour, on his arm. The Lord of Brandon wore black and silver, and Westover's champion was in forest green. Many an ancient brocade had been awakened for the nonce from its lavender bed, and ruffs and gold-braid were at no premium.

To the twanging of the deft black fingers, they passed in gorgeous array between files of low-cut gowns and flower-like faces and masculine swallow-tails, to the yellow parlor. Once there the music

ceased with a splendid crash, the eleven knights each dropped upon one knee, the eleven ladies-in-waiting curtsied low, and Shirley, seated upon the dais, leaned her burnished head to receive the crown. What though the bauble was but bristol-board, its jeweled chasing but tinsel and paste? On her head it glowed and trembled, a true diadem. As Valiant set the glittering thing on those rich and wonderful coils, the music of her presence was singing a swift melody in his blood.

His coronation address held no such flowery periods as would have rolled from the major's soul. He had chosen a single paragraph he had lighted on in an old book in the library — a history of the last Crusade in French black-letter. He had translated and memorized the archaic phrasing, keeping the quaint feeling of the original:

"These noble Knights bow in your presence, fair lady, as their Leige, whom they know as even in judgment, as dainty in fulfilling these our acts of arms, and do recommend their all unto your Good Grace in as lowly wise as they can. O Queen, in whom the whole story of virtue is written with the language of beauty, your eyes, which have been only wont to discern the bowed knees of kneeling hearts and, inwardly turned, found always the heavenly solace of a sweet mind, see them, ready in heart and able with hands not only to assailing but to prevailing."

A hushed rustle of applause — not loud: the merest whisper of silken feet and feathered fans tapped softly — testified to a widespread approbation. It was the first sight many there had had of John Valiant and in both looks and manner be fitted their best ideals. True, his accent had not that subtle gloze, that consonantal softness and intonation that mark the Southron, but he was a Southron for all that, and one of themselves.

The queen's curtsey was the signal for the music, which throbbed suddenly into a march, and she stepped down beside him. Couple after couple, knights and ladies, ranged behind them, till the twenty-four stood ready for the royal quadrille. It was the old-fashioned lancers, but the deliberate strain lent the familiar measures something of the stately effect of the minuet. The rhythmic waves alternately bore Shirley to his arms and whisked her away, for fleeting hand-touch of this or that demure or laughing maid, giving him glimpses of the seated rows by the walls, of flower vistas, of open windows beyond which peered shining black faces delightedly watching.

Quadrilles were not invented as aids to conversation, and John Valiant's and Shirley's was necessarily limited. "The decorations are simply delicious!" she said as they faced each other briefly. "How *did* you manage it?"

"Home talent with a vengeance Uncle Jeffer-

son and I did it with our little hatchets. But the roses —"

They were swooped apart and Shirley found herself curtsying to Chilly Lusk. "More than queen!" he said under his breath. "I had *my* heart set on naming you to-day. I reckon I've lost my rabbit-foot!"

Opposite, in the turn, Betty Page had slipped her dainty hand into John Valiant's. "Ah haven't seen such a lovely dance for *yeahs!*" she sighed. "Isn't Shirley too sweet? If Ah had hair like hers, Ah wouldn't speak to a soul on earth!"

The exigencies of the figure gave no space for answer, and presently, after certain labyrinthine evolutions, Shirley's eyes were gazing into his again. "How adorably you look!" he whispered, as he bowed over her hand. "How does it feel to be a queen?"

"This little head was never made to wear a crown," she laughed. "Queens should be regal. Miss Fargo would have —"

The music swept the rest away, but not the look of blinding reproach he gave her that made her heart throb wildly as she glided on.

The last note of the quadrille slipped into a waltz dreamily slow, and Valiant put his arm about Shirley and they floated away. Once before, in the moonlighted garden at Rosewood, she had lain in

his arms for one brief instant; then she had seemed like some trapped wood-thing resisting. Now, her slender body swaying to his every motion, she was another creature. Under the drooping tawny hair her face was almost as pale as the white satin of her gown; her lips were parted, and as they moved, he could feel her heart rise and fall to her languorous breath.

There was no speech between them; for those few golden moments all else vanished utterly, and he guided by instinct, as oblivious to the floor-full as if he were drifting through some enchanted ether, holding to his breast the incarnation of all loveliness, a thing of as frail enchantment as the glow of stars upon snow, yet for him always the one divine vision!

CHAPTER XXXVI

BY THE SUN-DIAL

EYES arched with fan-shielded whispers, and fair faces, foreshortened as they turned back over powder-white shoulders, followed their swallow-like movement. From an ever-widening circle of masculine devotees Katharine Fargo watched them with a smile that cloaked an increasing and unwelcome question.

Katharine had never looked more handsome; a critical survey of her mirror at Gladden Hall had assured her of that. Never had her poise been more superb, her toilet more enrapturing. She was exquisitely gowned in rose-colored mousseline-de-soie, embroidered in tiny brilliants laid on in Greek patterns. From her neck, in a single splendid loop of iridescence against the rosy mist, depended those fabulous pearls — "the kind you simply *can't* believe," as Betty Page confided to her partner — on whose newspaper reproduction (actual diameter) metropolitan shop-girls had been wont to gaze with glistening eyes; and within their milky circlet, on her rounded breast, trembled three pale gold-veined orchids.

Watching that quadrille through her drooping emerald-tinted eyes, she had received a sudden enlightening impression of Shirley's flawless beauty. At the tournament her fleeting glimpse had adjudged the other merely sweetly pretty. The Chalmers' surrey had stopped en route for Shirley, but in her wraps and veil she had then been all but invisible. This had been Katharine's first adequate view, and the sight of her radiant charm had the effect almost of a blow.

For Katharine, be it said, had wholly surrendered to the old, yet new, attraction that had swept her on the tourney field. This feeling was no less cerebral and intellectual than it had been: she was no Galatea waiting her Pygmalion. But it was strong for all that. And what had lain always in the back of her mind as a half-formed intention, had become a self-admitted purpose during the motor ride. So as she watched them in the waltz, seasoned artificialist as she was, Katharine for a breath had had need of all her address to keep the ball of conversation sparklingly a-roll. Her natural assurance, however, came quickly to her aid. She had been an acknowledged beauty too many seasons — had known John Valiant, or believed she had, too long and too well — to allow the swift keen edge of trepidation that had touched her to cool into prescience.

In another moment the waltz fainted out, to be succeeded by a *deux-temps,* and presently the host,

in his crimson cloak, was doffing his plumed hat before her. Circling the polished floor in the maze, there was something gratefully like former days in the assured touch, the true and ready guidance. The intrusive question faded. He was the John Valiant she had always known, of flashing repartee and graceful compliment, yet with a touch of dignity, too — as befitted the lord of a manor — which sat well upon him. After a decorous dozen of rounds, she took his arm and allowed her perfect figure to be conducted through the various rooms of the ground floor, chatting in quite the old-time way, till a new gallant claimed her.

The mellow strings made on their merry tune, and at length the *Washington Post* marched all in flushed unity of purpose to the great muslin-walled porch with its array of tables groaning under viands concocted by Aunt Daphne for the delectation of the palate-weary: layer-cakes, furry-brown with chocolate, or saffron with orange icing; fruit-cake richer than an Indian begum; angel-cake as white (as the major was to remark) as innocence and almost as sweet as the lady upon whom he pressed it at the moment; yellow jumbles, kisses that crumbled at a touch, and all nameless toothsome inventions for which new-laid eggs are beaten and golden citron sliced.

And then once more the waltz-strain supervened and in the yellow parlor joy was again unconfined.

Among the masculine contingent, perhaps, the same catholicity of age no longer prevailed, certain of the elders showing an inclination toward one end of the front porch, now hazing with the fragrance of Havanas. But the dowagers' fans plied on, the rose-corners echoed their light laughter and the couples footed it as though midnight was yet unreached and dawn as far afield as Judgment Day.

Again Valiant claimed Katharine and they glided off on *The Beautiful Blue Danube.* Her paleness now had a tinge of color but nevertheless he thought she drooped. "You are tired," he said, "shan't we sit it out?"

"Oh, do you mind?" she responded gratefully. "It *has* been a fairly strenuous day, hasn't it!"

He guided her to a corridor, where branches of rhododendron screened an alcove of settees and seductive cushions. Here, her weariness seemed put to rout. There was no drooping of fringed lids, no disconcerting silences; she chatted with ease and piquancy.

"It's like a fairy tale," she said at length dreamily,—"this wonderful life. To step into it from New York is like coming out of a hot-house into the spring out-of-doors! It makes our city existence seem so sordidly artificial. You have chosen right."

"I know it. And yet two months ago a life a

hundred miles from the avenue would have seemed a sad and sandy Sahara. I know better now."

"I have been listening to pæans all the evening," she said. "And you deserve them. It's a fine big thing you are attempting — the restoring of this old estate. And I know you have even bigger plans, too."

He nodded, suddenly serious and thoughtful. "There's a lot I'd like to do. It's not only the house and grounds. There are . . . other things. For instance, back on the mountain — on my own land — is a settlement they call Hell's-Half-Acre. Probably it has well earned the name. It's a wretched collection of hovels and surly men and drabs of women and unkempt children, the poorest of poor-whites. Not one of them can read or write, and they live like animals. If I'm ever able, I mean to put a manual-training school up there. And then —"

He ended with a half laugh, suddenly conscious that he was talking in a language she would scarcely understand — in fact, in a tongue new to himself. But there was no smile on her lips and her extraordinary eyes — cool gray, shot through with emerald — were looking into his with a frankness and sympathy he would not have guessed lay beneath her glacial placidity.

To Katharine, indeed, it made little difference

what philanthropic fads the man she had chosen might affect as regarded his tenantry. Ambitions like these had a manorial flavor that did not displease her. And the Fargo millions would bear much harmless hammering. A change, subtle and incommunicable, passed over her.

"I shall think of you," she sighed, "as working on in this splendid program. For it *is* splendid. But New York will miss you, John."

"Ah, no. I've no delusions on that score. I dare say I'm almost forgotten there already. Here I have a *place*."

Her head, leaned back against the cushion, turned toward him, the pale orchids trembling on her bosom — she was so near that he could feel her breath on his cheek. A new waltz had begun to sigh its languorous measures.

"Place?" she queried. "Do you think you had no place there? Is it possible that you do not understand that your going has left — a void?"

He looked at her suddenly, and her eyes fell. No sophisticated blushing this, though it was by such effective employment of her charms that her wonderful body and pliant mind had been drilled and fashioned from her babyhood. Katharine at the moment was as near the luxury of real embarrassment as she had ever been in her life.

Before he answered, however, the big form of Major Bristow appeared, looking about him.

"It has — left a void," she said, her eyes still downcast, her voice just low enough, "— for *me.*"

The major pounced upon them at this juncture, feelingly accusing John of the nefarious design of robbing the assemblage of its bright and particular star. When Katharine put her hand in her cavalier's arm, her eyes were dewy under their long shading lashes and her fine lips ever so little tremulous. It had been her best available moment, and she had used it.

As she moved away, her faint color slightly heightened, she was glad of the interruption. It was better as it was. When John Valiant came to her again. . . .

But to him, as he stood watching her move lightly from him, there was vouchsafed illumination. It came to him suddenly that that placidity and hauteur which he had so admired in the old days were no mask for fires within. The exquisite husk was the real Katharine. Hers was the loveliness of some tall white lily cut in marble, splendid but chill. And with the thought, between him and her there swept through the shimmering candle-lighted air a breath of wet rose-fragrance like an impalpable cloud, and set in the midst of it a misty star-tinted gown sprayed with lilies-of-the-valley, and above it a girl's face clear and vivid, her deep shadow-blue eyes fixed on his.

The music of a two-step was languishing when, a little later, Valiant and Shirley strolled down between the garden box-hedges, cypress-shaped and lifting spire-like toward a sky which bent, a silent canopy of mauve and purplish blue. The moon drowsed between the trees like a great yellow moth, and the shadows of the branches lay on the ground like sharp bluish etchings on light green paper. Behind them Damory Court lay a nest of woven music and laughter. The long white-muslined porch shimmered goldenly, and beside it under the lanterns dallied a flirtatious couple or two, ghost-like in the shadows.

Peace brooded over all, a vast sweet silence creeping through the trees — only here and there the twitter of a waking bird — and around them was the glimmer of tall flowers standing like pensive moon-worshipers in an ecstasy of prayerless bloom.

"Come," he said. "Let me take you to see the sun-dial now."

The tangle had been cut away and a narrow gravel-path led through the pruned creepers. She made an exclamation of delight. The onyx-pillar stood in an oasis of white — moonflowers, white dahlias, mignonette and narcissus; bars of late lilies-of-the-valley beyond these, bordered with Arum-lilies, white clematis, iris and bridal-wreath, shading out into tender paler hues that ringed the spotless purity like dawning passion.

"White for happiness," he quoted. "You said that when you brought me here — the day we planted the ramblers. Do you remember what I said? That some day, perhaps, I should love this spot the best of all at Damory Court." He was silent a moment, tracing with his finger the motto on the dial's rim. "When I was very little," he went on,—"hardly more than three years old, I think,—my father and I had a play, in which we lived in a great mansion like this. It was called Wishing-House, and it was in the middle of the Never-Never Land — a sort of beautiful fairy country in which everything happened right. I know now that the Never-Never Land was Virginia, and that Wishing-House was Damory Court. No wonder my father loved it! No wonder his memory turned back to it always! I've wanted to make it as it was when he lived here. And I want the old dial to count happy hours for me."

Something had crept into his tone that struck her with a strange sweet terror and tumult of mind. The hand that clutched her skirts about her knees had begun to tremble and she caught the other hand to her cheek in a vague hesitant gesture. The moonflowers seemed to be great round eyes staring up at her.

"Shirley —" he said, and now his voice was shaken with longing —"will you make my happiness for me?"

She was standing perfectly still against the sundial, both hands, laced together, against her breast, her eyes on his with a strange startled look. Over the hush of the garden now, like the very soul of the passionate night, throbbed the haunting barcarole of *Tales of Hoffmann:*

"Night of stars and night of love—"

an inarticulate echo of his longing. He took a step toward her, and she turned like one in sudden terror seeking a way of escape. But he caught her close in his arms.

"I love you!" he said. "Hear it now in my bride's garden that I've made for you! I love you, I *love* you!"

For one instant she struggled. Then, slowly, her eyes turned to his, the sweet lips trembling, and something dawning deep in the dewy blue that turned all his leaping blood to quicksilver. "My darling!" he breathed, and their lips met.

In that delirious moment both had the sense of divine completion that comes only with love returned. For him there was but the woman in his arms, the one woman created for him since the foundation of the world. It was Kismet. For this he had come to Virginia. For this fate had turned and twisted a thousand ways. Through the riot of his senses, like a silver blaze, ran the legend of the calendar: "Every man carries his fate

upon a riband about his neck." For her, something seemed to pass from her soul with that kiss, some deep irrevocable thing, shy but fiercely strong, that had sprung to him at that lip-contact as steel to magnet. The foliage about them flared up in green light and the ground under her feet rose and fell like deep sea-waves.

She lifted her face to him. It was deathly pale, but the light that burned on it was lit from the whitest altar-fires of Southern girlhood. "Six weeks ago," she whispered, "you had never seen me!"

He held her crushed to him. She could feel his heart thudding madly. "I've always known you," he said. "I've seen you a thousand times. I saw you coming to meet me down a cherry-blossomed lane in Kyoto. I've seen your eyes peering from behind a veil in India. I've heard your voice calling to me, through the padding camels' feet, from the desert mirages. You are the dream I have gone searching always! Ah, *Shirley, Shirley, Shirley!*"

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE DOCTOR SPEAKS

WHILE the vibrant strings hummed and sang through the roses, and the couples drifted on tireless and content, or blissfully "sat out" dances on the stairway, Katharine Fargo held her stately court no less gaily for the stealthy doubt that was creeping over her spirit. She had been so certain of what would happen that evening that when her father (between cigars on the porch with Judge Chalmers and Doctor Southall) had searched her out under a flag-of-truce, she had sent him to the right-about, laughingly declining to depart before royalty. But number followed number, and the knight in purple and gold had not paused again before her. Now the scarlet cloak no longer flaunted among the dancers, and the white satin gown and sparkling coronal had disappeared. The end of the next "round-dance" found her subsiding into the flower-banked alcove suddenly distrait amid her escort's sallies. It was at this moment that she saw, entering the corridor from the garden, the missing couple.

It was not the faint flush on Shirley's cheek —

that was not deep — nor was it his nearness to her, though they stood closely, as lovers might. But there was in both their faces a something that resurgent conventionality had not had time to cover — a trembling reflection of that "light that never was, on sea or land" — which was like a death-stab to what lay far deeper than Katharine's heart, her pride. She drew swiftly back, dismayed at the sudden verification, and for an instant her whole body chilled.

A craving for a glass of water has served its purpose a thousand times; as her cavalier solicitously departed to fetch the cooling draught, she rose, and carelessly humming the refrain the music had just left off, sauntered lightly out by another door to the open air. A swift glance about her showed her she was unobserved and she stepped down to the grass and along the winding path to a bench at some distance in the shrubbery. Here the smiling mask slipped from her face and with a shiver she dropped her hot face in her hands.

There were no tears. The wave that was welling over her was one of bitter humiliation. She had shot her bolt and missed — she, Katharine Fargo! For three years she had held John Valiant, romantically speaking, in the hollow of her shapely hand. Now she had all but thrown herself at his feet — and he had turned away to this flame-haired, vivid girl whom he had not known as many months!

The rankling barb was dipped in no poison of unrequited love. Hers was the anger of the self-willed and intensely proud woman denied her dearest wish, and crossed and flouted for the first time in her pampered exquisite life.

Heavy footfalls all at once approached her — two men were coming from the house. There was the spitting crackle of a match, and as she peered out, its red flare lighted the massive face and floating hair of Major Bristow. His companion's face was in the shadow. She waited, thinking they would pass; but to her annoyance, when she looked again, they had seated themselves on a bench a few paces away.

To be found mooning in the shrubbery like a schoolgirl did not please her, but it seemed there was no recourse, and she had half arisen, when the major's gruff-voiced companion spoke a name that caused her to sit down abruptly. To do Katharine justice, it did not occur to her at the moment that she was eavesdropping. And such was the significance of the sentences she heard, and such their bearing on the turmoil of her mind, that a woman of more sensitive fiber might have lingered.

"Bristow, Shirley's a magnificent girl."

"Finest in seven counties," agreed the major's bass.

"Whom do you reckon she'll choose to marry?"

"Chilly Lusk, of course. The boy's been in love

with her since they were in bibs. And he comes as near being fit for her as anybody."

"Humph!" said the other sardonically. "No man I ever saw was half good enough for a good woman. But good women marry just the same. It isn't Lusk. I used to think it would be, but I've got a pair of eyes in my head, if you haven't. It's young Valiant."

The pearl fan twisted in Katharine's fingers. What she had guessed was an open secret, then!

The major made an exclamation that had the effect of coming after a jaw-dropped silence. "I — I never thought of that!"

The other resumed slowly, somewhat bitterly, it seemed to the girl listening. "If her mother was in love with Sassoon —"

Katharine's heart beat fast and then stood still. Sassoon! That was the name of the man Valiant's father had killed in that old duel of which Judge Chalmers had told! "If her mother"— Shirley Dandridge's mother —" was in love with Sassoon!" Why —

"*Was* she?"

The major's query held a sharpness that seemed almost appeal. She was conscious that the other had faced about abruptly.

"I've always believed so, certainly. If she had loved Valiant, would she have thrown him over

merely because he broke his promise not to be a party to a quarrel?"

"You think not?" said the major huskily.

"Not under the circumstances. Valiant was forced into it. No gentleman, at that day, could have declined the meeting. He could have explained it to Judith's satisfaction — a woman doesn't need much evidence to justify the man she's in love with. He must have written her — he couldn't have gone away without that — and if she had loved him, she would have called him back."

The major made no answer. Katharine saw a cigar fall unheeded upon the grass, where it lay glowing like a panther's eye.

The other had risen now, his stooped figure bulking in the moonlight. His voice sounded harsh and strained: "I loved Beauty Valiant," he said, "and his son is his son to me — but I have to think of Judith, too. She fainted, Bristow, when she saw him — Shirley told me about it. Her mother has made her think it was the scent of the roses! He's his father's living image, and he's brought the past back with him. Every sound of his voice, every sight of his face, will be a separate stab! Oh, his mere presence will be enough for Judith to bear. But with her heart in the grave with Sassoon, what would love between Shirley and young Valiant mean to her? Think of it!"

He broke off, and there was a blank of silence, in

which he turned with almost a sigh. Then Katharine saw him reach the bench with a single stride and drop his hand on the bowed shoulder.

"Bristow!" he said bruskly. "You're ill! This confounded philandering at your time of life—"

The major's face looked ashy pale, but he got up with a laugh. "Not I," he said; "I was never better in my life! We've had our mouthful of air. Come on back to the house."

"Not much!" grunted the other. "I'm going where we both ought to have been hours ago." He threw away his cigar and stalked down the path into the darkness.

The major stood looking after him till he had disappeared, then suddenly dropped on the bench and covered his face. Something like a groan burst from him.

"My God!" he said, and his voice came to Katharine with a quaver of age and suffering — very different from the jovial accents of the ballroom —"if I were only sure it *was* Sassoon!"

Presently he rose, and went slowly toward the lighted doorway.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE AMBUSH

NOT long after, from the musicians' bower the sound of *Home, Sweet Home* drifted over the poignant rose-scent, and presently the driveway resounded to rolling wheels and the voices of negro drivers, and the house-entrance jostled with groups, muffled in loose carriage-wraps, silken cloaks and light overcoats, calling tired but laughing farewells.

Katharine, on the step, found herself looking into Valiant's eyes. "How can I tell you how much I have enjoyed it all?" she said. "I've stayed till the very last minute — which is something for one's fourth season! And now, good-by, for we are off to-morrow for Hot Springs." Her face may have been a little worn, a trifle hard under the emerald-tinted eyes, but her smile seemed friendly and unclouded.

Her father had long ago betaken himself homeward, and the big three-seated surrey — holding "six comf'table and nine fumiliah," in the phrase of Lige the coachman — had returned for the rest: Judge Chalmers, the two younger girls and Shirley.

Katharine greeted the latter with a charming smile. What more natural than that she should find herself straightway on the rear seat with royalty? The two girls safely disposed in the middle, the judge climbed up beside the driver, who cracked his whip and they were off.

The way was not long, and Katharine had need of despatch if that revengeful weapon were to be used which fate had put into her hands. She wasted little time.

"It seems so strange," she said, "to find our host in such surroundings! I can scarcely believe him the same John Valiant I've danced with a hundred times in New York. He's been here such a short while and yet he couldn't possibly be more at home if he'd lived in Virginia always. And you all treat him as if he were quite one of yourselves."

Shirley smiled enchantingly. "Why, yes," she said, "maybe it seems odd to outsiders. But, you see, with us a Valiant is always a Valiant. No matter where he has lived, he's the son of his father and the master of Damory Court."

"That's the wonderful part of it. It's so — so English, somehow."

"Is it?" said Shirley. "I never thought of it. But perhaps it seems so. We have the old houses and the old names and think of them, no doubt, in the same way."

"What a sad life his father had!" pursued Katha-

rine dreamily. "You know all about the duel, of course?"

Shirley shrank imperceptibly now. The subject touched Valiant so closely it seemed almost as if it belonged to him and to her alone — not a thing to be flippantly touched on. "Yes," she said somewhat slowly, "every one here knows of it."

"No doubt it has been almost forgotten," the other continued, "but John's coming must naturally have revamped the old story. What was it about — the quarrel? A love-affair?"

"I — I don't think it is known."

But reluctant coldness did not deter the questioner. "Who was it said there was a petticoat back of every ancient war?" quoted Katharine, lightly. "I fancy it's the same with the duello. But how strange that nobody *knows*. Some of the older ones must, don't you think?"

"It's so long ago," murmured Shirley. "I suppose some could tell if they would."

"Major Bristow, perhaps," conjectured Katharine thoughtfully.

"He was one of the seconds," admitted Shirley unhappily. "But by common consent that side of it wasn't talked of at the time. Men in Virginia have old-fashioned ideas about women. . . ."

"Ah, it's *fine* of them!" pæaned Katharine. "I can imagine the men who knew about that dreadful affair, in their Southern chivalry, drawing a cordon

of silence about the name of that girl with her broken heart! For if she loved one of the two, it must have been Sassoon — not Valiant, else he would have stayed. How terrible to see one's lover killed in such a way. . . . It was quickly ended for him, but the poor woman was left to bear it all the years! She may be living yet, here maybe, some one whom everybody knows. I suppose I am imaginative," she added, "but I can't help wondering about her. I fancy she would never wholly get over it, never be able to forget him, though she tried."

Shirley made some reply that was lost in the whirring wheels. The other's words seemed almost an echo of what she herself had been thinking.

"Maybe she married after a while, too. A woman must make a life for herself, you know. If she lives here, it will be sad for her, this opening of the old wound by John's coming. . . . And looking so like his father —"

Katharine paused. There was a kind of exhilaration in this subtle baiting. Determined as she was that Shirley should guess at the truth before that ride ended, bludgeon-wielding was not to her taste. She preferred the keen needle-point that injected its poison before the thrust was even felt. She waited, wondering just how much it would be necessary for her to say.

Shirley stirred uneasily, and in the glimpsing light her face looked troubled. Katharine's voice had

touched pathos, and in spite of her distaste of the subject, Shirley had been entering into the feeling of that supposititious woman. There had come to her, like a touch of eery clairvoyance, the suggestion the other had meant to convey of her actual existence; and this was sharpened by the sudden recollection that Valiant had himself told her of the resemblance that Katharine recalled.

The judge, on the front seat, was telling a low-toned story over his shoulder for the delectation of Nancy and Betty, but Shirley was not listening. Her whole mind was full of what Katharine had been saying. She was picturing to herself this woman, her secret hidden all these years, hearing of John Valiant's coming to Damory Court, learning of this likeness, shrinking from sight of it, dreading the painful memory it must thrust upon her.

"Suppose"— Katharine's voice was dreamy — "that she and John met suddenly, without warning. What would she do? Would she say anything? Perhaps she would faint. . . ."

Shirley started violently. Her hands, as they drew her cloak uncertainly about her, began to tremble, as if with cold. Something fell from them to the bottom of the surrey.

Through her chiffon veil Katharine noted this with a slow smile. It had been easier than she had thought. She said no more, and the carriage rolled on, to the accompaniment of giggles over the judge's

peroration. As it neared the Rosewood lane she leaned toward Shirley.

"You have dropped your fan," said she "— and your gloves, too. . . . I might have reached them for you. Why, we are there already. How short the drive has seemed!"

"Don't drive up the lane, Lige," said Shirley, and her voice seemed sharp and strange even to herself. "The wheels would wake mother." Katharine bade her good-by with careful sweetness, as the judge bundled her down in his strong friendly arms.

"No," she told him, "don't come with me. It's not a bit necessary. Emmaline will be waiting for me."

He climbed into her vacant place as the girls called their good nights. "We'll all sleep late enough in the morning, I reckon," he said with a laugh, "but it's been a great success!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

WHAT THE CAPE JESSAMINES KNEW

EMMALINE was crouched in a chair in the hall, a rug thrown over her knees, in open-mouthed slumber. She started up at the touch of Shirley's hand, yawning widely.

"I 'clare to goodness," she muttered, "I was jes' fixin' t' go t' sleep!" The lamp on the table was low and she turned up the wick, then threw up her arms like ramrods, in delight.

"Lor', honey," she said in a rapturous whisper, "I reck'n they all say yo' was th' *purties'* queen on earth, when th' vict'ry man set that crown, with th' di'mon's as big as scaley-barks, on that little gol' haid! But yo' pale, honey-chile. Yo' dance yo'-se'f mos' ter death, I reck'n."

"I — I'm so tired, Emmaline. Take the crown. It's heavy."

The negro woman untangled the glittering points from the meshing hair with careful fingers. "Po' li'l chickydee-dee!" she said lovingly. "Reck'n she flop all th' feddahs outer her wings. Gimme that ol' tin crown — I like ter lam' it out th' winder!

Come on, now; we go up-stairs soft so's not ter 'sturb Mis' Judith."

In the silvery-blue bedroom, she deftly unfastened the hooks of the heavy satin gown and coaxed her mistress to lie on the sofa while she unpinned the masses of waving hair till they lay in a rich surge over the cushion. Then she brought a brush and crouching down beside her, began with long gentle strokes to smooth out the silken threads, talking to her the while in a soft crooning monotone.

"I jes' know Mis' Judith wish she well ernuf ter see her chile bein' queens en things 'mongst all th' othah qual'ty! When they want er *queen* they jes' gotter come fo' her little girl. Talk 'bout th' stars — she 'way above *them!* Ranston he say Mistah Valiant 'bout th' bestes' dancer in th' world; say th' papers up in New York think th' sun rise en set in his heels. 'Spec' ter-night he dance er little with th' othahs jes' ter be p'lite, till he git back ter th' one he put th' crown on. So-o-o tired she is! But Em'line gwine ter bresh away all th' achiness — en she got yo' baid all turned *down* fo' yo'—en yo' pretty little night-dress all *ready* — en yo' gwineter *sleep* — en *sleep* — till yo' kyan sleep no mo' *no-how!*"

Under these ministrations Shirley lay languid and speechless, her eyes closed. The fear that had stricken her heart by turns seemed a cold hand pressing upon its beating and an algid vapor rising

stealthily over it. But her hands were hot and her eyelids burned. Finally she roused herself.

"Thank you, Emmaline," she said in a tired voice, "good night now; I'm going to sleep, and you must go to bed, too."

But alone in the warm wan dark, Shirley lay staring open-eyed at the ceiling. Slowly the terror was seizing upon her, the dread, noiseless and intangible, folding her in the shadow of its numbing wings. Was her mother the one over whom that old duel had been fought? Was it she whose love had been wrecked in that long-ago tragedy that all at once seemed so horribly near and real? Was that the explanation of her fainting? She remembered the cape jessamines. Was the date of that duel — of the death of Sassoon — the anniversary her mother kept?

She sat up in bed, trembling. Then she rose, and opening the door with caution, crept down the stair, sliding her hot hand before her along the cool polished banister. Only a subdued glimmer came through the curtained windows, stealing in with the ever-present scent of the arbors. It was so still she thought she could hear the very heart of the dark beating. As she passed through the lower hall, a hound on the porch, scenting her, stirred, thumped his tail on the flooring, and whined. Groping her way to the dining-room, she lighted a candle and passed through a corridor into a low-ceilinged cham-

ber employed as a general receptacle — a glorified garret, as Mrs. Dandridge dubbed it.

It showed a strange assemblage! A row of chests, stored with winter clothing, gave forth a clean pungent smell of cedar, and at one side stood an antique spinet and a worn set of horsehair furniture. Sofa and chairs were piled with excrescences in the shape of old engravings in carved ebony frames, ancient scrap-books and what-not, and on a table stood a rounded glass case with a flat base — the sort in which an older generation had been wont to display to awestruck admiration its terrifying concoctions of wax fruit.

Shirley had turned her miserable eyes on a book-shelf along one wall. The volumes it contained had been her father's, and among them stood a row of tomes taller than their fellows — the bound numbers of a county newspaper, beginning before the war. The back of each was stamped with the year. She was deciphering these faded imprints. "Thirty years ago," she whispered; "yes, here it is."

She set down the candle and dragged out one of the huge leather-backs. Staggering under the weight, she rested its edge on the table and began feverishly to turn the pages, her eye on the date-line. She stopped presently with a quick breath — she had reached May 15th. The year was that of the duel: the date was the day following the jessa-

mine anniversary. Fearfully her eye overran the columns.

Then suddenly she put her open hand on the page as though to blot out the words, every trace of color stricken from cheek and brow. But the line seemed to glow up through the very flesh: "*Died, May 14th; Edward Sassoon, in his twenty-sixth year.*"

The book slipped to the floor with a crash that echoed through the room. It was true, then! It *was* Sassoon's death that her mother mourned. The man in whose arms she had stood such a little while ago by the old dial of Damory Court was the son of the man who had killed him! She lifted her hands to her breast with a gesture of anguish, then dropped to her knees, buried her face on the dusty seat of one of the rickety horsehair chairs and broke into a wild burst of sobs, noiseless but terrible, that seemed to rise in her heart and tear themselves up through her breast.

"Oh, God," she whispered, "just when I was so happy! Oh, mother, mother! You loved him, and your heart broke when he died. It was Valiant who broke it — Valiant — Valiant. His father!"

She slipped down upon the bare floor and crouched there shuddering and agonized, her disheveled hair wet with her tears. Was her love to be but the thing of an hour, a single clasp — and then, forever, nothing? His father's deed was not his fault. Yet how could she love a man whose every

feature brought a pang to that mother she loved more than herself? So, over and over, the wheel of her thought turned in the same desolate groove, and over and over the paroxysms of grief and longing submerged her.

Dawn was paling the guttering candle and streaking the sky outside before she composed herself. She rose heavily, as white as a narcissus flower, winding back her hair from her quivering face, and struggling to repress the tearless sobs that still caught stranglingly at her breath. The gray infiltrating light seemed gaunt and cruel, and the thin cheeping of waking sparrows on the lawn came to her with a haunting intolerable note of pain.

Noiselessly as she had descended, she crept again up the stair. As she passed her mother's door, she paused a moment, and laying her arms out across it, pressed her lips to the dark grain of the wood.

CHAPTER XL

THE AWAKENING

THE sun had passed the meridian next day when Valiant awoke, from a sleep as deep as Abou ben Adhem's, yet one crowded with flying tiptoe dreams. Inchoate and of such flimsy material that the first whiff of reality dissipated them like smoke, these nevertheless left behind them a fragrance, a sensation of golden sweetness and delight. The one great fact of Shirley's love had lain at the core of all these honied images, and his mind was full of it as his eyes opened, wide all at once, to the new day.

He looked at his watch and rolled from the bed with a laugh. "Past twelve!" he exclaimed. "Good heavens! What about all the work I had laid out for to-day?"

He went down the stair in his bath-robe. The walls were still wreath-hung, but the rooms had been despoiled of their roses: only a dozen vases of blooms still unwithered remained of the greater glory; and in the yellow parlor — a great heap of shriveled petals, broken ivy and dewy-blue cedar berries, sprinkled with wisps of feathers and se-

quinned beads — lay the shattered remainders of last night's gaiety.

Presently he was splashing in the lake, shooting under his curved hand unerring jets of water at Chum, who danced about the rim barking, now venturing to wet a valorous paw, now scrambling up the bank to escape the watery javelins.

It was another perfect day, though far on the mountainous horizon a blue-black density promised otherwise for the morrow. The sun lay golden-soft over the huddled hills. Birds darted hither and thither, self-important bumble-bees boomed from vine to vine and the shady lake-corners flashed with dragon-flies. The stately white swans turned their arching necks interrogatively toward the splashing, and the brown ducks, Peezletree and Pilgarlic, quacked and gobbled softly to each other among the lily-pads.

Valiant came up the terraces with his blood bounding to a new rapture. Crossing the garden, he ran quickly to the little close which held the sun-dial and pulled a single great passion-flower. He stood a moment holding it to his face, his nostrils catching its faint elusive perfume. Only last night, under the moon, he had stood there with Shirley in his arms. A gush of the unbelievable sweetness of that moment poured over him. His face softened.

Standing with his sandaled feet deep in the white blossoms, the sun on his damp hair and the loose

robe clinging to his moist limbs, he gave himself to a sudden day-dream. A wonderful waking dream of joy overflooding years of ambitionless ease; of the Damory Court that should be in days to come.

Summer would pass to autumn, with maple-foliage falling in golden rain, and fawn-brown fields scattered with life-everlasting, with the wine-red beauty of October, its purple pageant of crimsoning woods, its opal haze of Indian summer, and scent of burning leaves. Frost would lay its spectral stain over the old house like star-dew, and the scent of cider would linger under the apple-trees. In his mind's eye he could see Uncle Jefferson bent with the weight of hickory-logs for the eager chimney-piece, deep as the casement of a fortress. Snow-sandaled winter would lay its samite on the dark blue ramparts of the mountains, and droop the naked boughs of the mock-orange bushes, dishevel the evergreens like rough-and-tumble schoolboys, and cover the frosted ruts of the Red Road. But in Damory Court would be cheerful warmth and friendly noises, with a loved woman standing before the crackling fireplace whose mottoed "*I clinge*" was for him written in her fringed and gentian eyes. So he stood dreaming — a dream in the open sunlight, of a future that should never end, of work and plan, of comradeship and understanding, of cheer and tenderness and clasping hands and

clinging lips — of a woman's arms held out in that same adorable gesture of the tourney field, to little children's uncertain footsteps across that polished floor.

When he came from the little close there was a new mystery in the sunshine, a fresh and joyous meaning in the intense blue overarching of the imponderable sky. Every bird-note held its own love-secret. A wood-thrush sang it from a silver birch beside the summer-house, and a bob-white whistled it in the little valley beyond. Even the long trip-hammer of a far-away woodpecker beat a radiant tattoo.

He paused to greet the flaming peacock that sent out a curdling screech, in which the tentative *potterack! potterack!* of a guinea-fowl tangled itself softly. "Go on," he invited. "Explode all you want to, old Fire-Cracker. Hang your purple-and-gold pessimism! You only make the birds sound sweeter. Perhaps that's what you're for — who knows?"

He tried to work, but work was not for that marvelous afternoon. He wandered about the gardens, planning this or that addition: a little longer sweep to the pansy-bed — a clump of bull-rushes at the farther end of the lake. He peered into the stable: a saddle horse stood there now, but there should be more steeds stamping in those stalls one day, good

horse-flesh bought with sound walnut timber from the hillside. How he and Shirley would go galloping over those gleaming roads, in that roseate future when she belonged to him!

Uncle Jefferson, from the door of the kitchens, watched him swinging about in the sunshine, whistling the *Indian Serenade.*

"Young mars' feel 'way up in de clouds *dis* day," he said to Aunt Daphne. "He wake up ez glad ez ef he done 'fessed 'ligion las' night. Well, all de folkses cert'n'y 'joyed deyselves. Ol' Mistah Fargo done eat 'bout forty uh dem jumbles. Ah heah him talkin' ter Mars' John. 'Reck'n yo' mus' hab er crackahjack cook down heah,' he say. Hyuh, hyuh!"

"G'way wid yo' blackgyardin'!" sniffed Aunt Daphne, delighted. "Don' need ter come eroun' honey-caffuddlin' *me!*"

"Dat's whut he say," insisted Uncle Jefferson; "he did fo' er fac'!"

She drew her hands from the suds and looked at him anxiously. "Jeff'son, yo' reck'n Mars' John gwineter fotch dat Yankee 'ooman heah ter Dam'ry Co'ot, ter be ouah mistis?"

"Humph!" scoffed her spouse. "Dat high-falutin' gal whut done swaller de ramrod? No suh-ree-bob-tail! De oldah yo' gits, de mo' foolishah yo' citations is! Don' yo' tek no mo' trouble on yo' back den yo' kin keek off'n yo' heels! *She*

ain' gwineter run *dis* place, er ol' Devil-John tuhn ovah in he grave!"

Sunset found Valiant sitting in the music-room before the old square piano. In the shadowy chamber the keys of mother-of-pearl gleamed with dull colors under his fingers. He struck at first only broken chords, that became finally the haunting barcarole of *Tales of Hoffmann.* It was the air that had drifted across the garden when he had stood with Shirley by the sun-dial, in the moment of their first kiss. Over and over he played it, improvising dreamy variations, till the tender melody seemed the dear ghost of that embrace. At length he went into the library and in the crimsoning light sat down at the desk, and began to write:

"Dear Bluebird of mine:

"I can't wait any longer to talk to you. Less than a day has passed since we were together, but it might have been eons, if one measured time by heart-beats. What have you been doing and thinking, I wonder? I have spent those eons in the garden, just wandering about, dreaming over those wonderful, wonderful moments by the sun-dial. Ah, dear little wild heart born of the flowers, with the soul of a bird (yet you are woman, too!) that old disk is marking happy hours now for me!

"How have I deserved this thing that has come to me? — sad bungler that I have been! Sometimes it seems too glad and sweet, and I am suddenly desperately afraid I shall wake to find myself facing

another dull morning in that old, useless, empty life of mine. I am very humble, dear, before your love.

"Shall I tell you when it began with me? Not last night — nor the day we planted the ramblers. (Do you know, when your little muddy boot went trampling down the earth about their roots, I wanted to stoop down and kiss it? So dear everything about you was!) Not that evening at Rosewood, with the arbor fragrance about us. (I think I shall always picture you with roses all about you. Red roses the color of your lips!) No, it was not then that it began — nor that dreadful hour when you fought with me to save my life — nor the morning you sat your horse in the box-rows in that yew-green habit that made your hair look like molten copper. No, it began the first afternoon, when I sat in my motor with your rose in my hand! It has never left me since, by day or by night. And yet there are people in this age of airships and honking highways and typewriters who think love-at-first-sight is as out-of-date as our little grandmothers' hoops rusting in the garret. Ah, sweetheart, I, for one, know better!

"Suppose I had not come to Virginia — and known *you!* My heart jumps when I think of it. It makes one believe in fate. Here at the Court I found an old leaf-calendar — it sits at my elbow now, just as I came on it. The date it shows is May 14th, and its motto is: *Every man carries his fate upon a riband about his neck.* I like that.

"That first Sunday at St. Andrew's, I thought of a day — may it be soon! — when you and I might stand before that altar, with your people (my people, too, now) around us, and I shall hear you

say: 'I, Shirley, take thee, John —' And to think it is really to come true! Do you remember the text the minister preached from? It was 'But all men perceive that they have riches, and that their faces shine as the faces of angels.' I think I shall go about henceforth with my face shining, so that all men will see that *I* have riches — your love for me, dear.

"I am so happy I can hardly see the words — or perhaps it is that the sun has set. I am sending this over by Uncle Jefferson. Send me back just a word by him, sweetheart, to say I may come to you to-night. And add the three short words I am so thirsty to hear over and over — one verb between two pronouns — so that I can kiss them all at once!"

He raised his head, a little flushed and with eyes brilliant, lighted a candle, sealed the letter with the ring he wore and despatched it.

Thereafter he sat looking into the growing dusk, watching the pale lamps of the constellations deepen to green gilt against the lapis-lazuli of the sky, and listening to the insect noises dulling into the woven chorus of evening. Uncle Jefferson was long in returning, and he grew impatient finally and began to prowl through the dusky corridors like a leopard, then to the front porch and finally to the driveway, listening at every turn for the familiar slouching step.

When at length the old negro appeared, Valiant

took the note he brought, his heart beating rapidly, and carried it hastily in to the candle-light. He did not open it at once, but sat for a full minute pressing it between his palms as though to extract from the delicate paper the beloved thrill of her touch. His hand shook slightly as he drew the folded leaves from the envelope. How would it begin? "My Knight of the Crimson Rose?" or "Dear Gardener?" (She had called him Gardener the day they had set out the roses) or perhaps even "Sweetheart"? It would not be long, only a mere "Yes" or "Come to me," perhaps; yet even the shortest missive had its beginning and its ending.

He opened and read.

For an instant he stared unbelievingly. Then the paper crackled to a ball in his clutched hand, and he made a hoarse sound which was half a cry, then sat perfectly still, his whole face shuddering. What he crushed in his hand was no note of tender love-phrases; it was an abrupt dismissal. The staggering contretemps struck the color from his face and left every nerve raw and quivering. To be "nothing to her, as she could be nothing to him"? He felt a ghastly inclination to laugh. Nothing to her! The meaning of the lines was monstrous. It was inconceivable.

Presently, his brows frowning heavily, he spread out the crumpled paper and reread it with bitter slowness, weighing each phrase. "Something which

she had learned since she last saw him, which lay between them." She had not known it, then, last night, when they had kissed beside the sun-dial! She had loved him then! What could there be that thrust them irrevocably apart?

He sprang up and paced the floor in a blinding passion of resentment and revolt. "You *shall!* you *shall!*" he said between his set teeth. "We belong to each other! There can be nothing, nothing to separate us!" Again he pored over the page. "She could not see him again, could not even explain." The words seemed to echo themselves, bleak as hail on a prison pane. "If he went to St. Andrew's, he might find the reason why." What could she mean by the reference to St. Andrew's? He caught at that as a clue. Could the old church tell him what had reared itself in such dismal fashion between them?

Without stopping to think of the darkness or that the friendly doors of the edifice would be closed, he caught up his hat and went swiftly down the drive to the road, along which he plunged breathlessly. The blue star-sprinkled sky was now streaked with clouds like faded orchids, and the shadows on the uneven ground under his hurried feet made him giddy. Through the din and hurly-burly of his thoughts he was conscious of dimly-moving shapes across fences, the sweet breath of cows, and a negro pedestrian who greeted him in

passing. He was stricken suddenly with the thought that Shirley was suffering, too. It seemed incredible that he should now be raging along a country road at nightfall to find something that so horribly hurt them both.

It was almost dark — save for the starlight — when he saw the shadow of the square ivy-grown spire rearing stark from its huddle of foliage against the blurred background. He pushed open the gate and went slowly up the worn path toward the great iron-bound and hooded door. Under the larches on either hand the outlines of the gravestones loomed pallidly, and from the bell-tower came the faint inquiring cry of a small owl. Valiant stood still, looking about him. What could he learn here? He read no answer to the riddle. A little to one side of the path something showed snow-like on the ground, and he went toward it. Nearer, he saw that it was a mass of flowers, staring up whitely from the semi-obscurity from within an iron railing. He bent over, suddenly noting the scent; it was cape jessamine.

With a curious sensation of almost prescience plucking at him, he took a box of vestas from his pocket and struck one. It flared up illuminating a flat granite slab in which was cut a name and inscription:

EDWARD SASSOON
"Forgive us our trespasses."

The silence seemed to crash to earth like a great looking-glass and shiver into a million pieces. The wax dropped from his fingers and in the supervening darkness a numb fright gripped him by the throat. Shirley had laid these there, on the grave of the man his father had killed — the cape jessamines she had wanted that day, *for her mother!* He understood.

It came to him at last that there was a chill mist groping among the trees and that he was very cold.

He went back along the Red Road stumblingly. Was this to be the end of the dream, which he had fancied would last forever? Could it be that she was not for him? Was it no hoary lie that the sins of the fathers were visited upon the third and fourth generation?

When he reentered the library the candle was guttering in the burned wings of a night-moth. The place looked all at once gaunt and desolate and despoiled. What could Virginia, what could Damory Court, be to him without her? The wrinkled note lay on the desk and he bent suddenly with a sharp catching breath and kissed it. There welled over him a wave of rebellious longing. The candle spread to a hazy yellow blur. The walls fell away. He stood under the moonlight, with his arms about her, his lips on hers and his heart beating to the sound of the violins behind them.

He laughed — a harsh wild laugh that rang through the gloomy room. Then he threw himself on the couch and buried his face in his hands. He was still lying there when the misty rain-wet dawn came through the shutters.

CHAPTER XLI

THE COMING OF GREEF KING

IT was Sunday afternoon, and under the hemlocks, Rickey Snyder had gathered her minions — a dozen children from the near-by houses with the usual sprinkling of little blacks from the kitchens. There were parents, of course, to whom this mingling of color and degree was a matter of conventional prohibition, but since the advent of Rickey, in whose soul lay a Napoleonic instinct of leadership, this was more honored in the breach than in the observance.

"My! Ain't it scrumptious here now!" said Cozy Cabell, hanging yellow lady-slippers over her ears. "I wish we could play here always."

"Mr. Valiant will let us," said Rickey. "I asked him."

"Oh, *he* will," responded Cozy gloomily, "but he'll probably go and marry somebody who'll be mean about it."

"Everybody doesn't get married," said one of the Byloe twins, with masculine assurance. "Maybe he won't."

"Much a boy knows about it!" retorted Cozy scornfully. "Women *have* to, and some one of

them will make him. (Greenville Female Seminary Simms, if you slap that little nigger again, I'll slap *you!*)"

Greenie rolled over on the grass and tittered. "Miss Mattie Sue didn'," she said. "Ah heah huh say de yuddah day et wuz er moughty good feelin' ter go ter baid Mistis en git up Marstah!"

"Well," said Cozy, tossing her head till the flower earrings danced, "I'm going to get married if the man hasn't got anything but a character and a red mustache. Married women don't have to prove they could have got a husband if they had wanted to."

"Let's play something," proposed Rosebud Meredith, on whom the discussion palled. "Let's play King, King Katiko."

"It's Sunday!"—this from her smaller and more righteous sister. "We're forbidden to play anything but Bible games on Sunday, and if Rosebud does, I'll tell."

"Jay-bird tattle-tale!" sang Rosebud derisively. "Don't care if you do!"

"Well," decreed Rickey. "We'll play Sunday-school then. It would take a saint to object to that. I'm superintendent and this stump's my desk. All you children sit down under that tree."

They ranged themselves in two rows, the white children, in clean Sabbath pinafores and go-to-meeting knickerbockers, in front and the colored ones, in ginghams and cotton-prints, in the rear — the

habitual expression of a differing social station. "Oh!" shrieked Miss Cabell, "and I'll be Mrs. Merryweather Mason and teach the infants' class."

"There isn't any infant class," said Rickey. "How could there be when there aren't any infants? The lesson is over and I've just rung the bell for silence. Children, this is Missionary Sunday, and I'm glad to see so many happy faces here to-day. Cozy," she said, relenting, "you can be the organist if you want to."

"I won't," said Cozy sullenly. "If I can't be table-cloth I won't be dish-rag."

"All right, you needn't," retorted Rickey freezingly. "Sit up, Greenie. People don't lie on their backs in Sunday-school."

Greenie yawned dismally, and righted herself with injured slowness. "Ah diffuses ter 'cep' yo' insult, Rickey Snydah," she said. "Ah'd ruthah lose mah 'ligion dan mah laz'ness. En Ah 'spises yo' 'spisable dissisition!"

"Let us all rise," continued Rickey, unmoved, "and sing *Kingdom Coming.*" And she struck up lustily, beating time on the stump with a stick:

> "From all the dark places of earth's heathen races,
> O, see how the thick shadows flee!"

and the rows of children joined in with unction, the colored contingent coming out strong on the chorus:

"De yerf shall be full ob de wunduhful story
As watahs dat covah de sea!"

The clear voices in the quiet air startled the fluttering birds and sent a squirrel to the tip-top of an oak, from which he looked down, flirting his brush. They roused a man, too, who had lain in a sodden sleep under a bush at a little distance. He was ragged and soiled and his heavy brutal face, covered with a dark stubble of some days' growth, had an ugly scar slanting from cheek to hair. Without getting up, he rolled over to command a better view, and set his eyes, blinking from their slumber, on the children.

"We will now take up the collection," said Rickey. ("You can do it, June. Use a flat piece of bark). Remember that what we give to-day is for the poor heathen in — in Alabama."

"That's no heathen place," objected Cozy with spirit. "My cousin lives in Alabama."

"Well, then," acquiesced Rickey, "anywhere you like. But I reckon your cousin wouldn't be above taking the money. For the poor heathen who have never heard of God, or Virginia, or anything. Think of them and give cheerfully."

The bark-slab made its rounds, receiving leaves, acorns, and an occasional pin. Midway, however, there arose a shrill shriek from the bearer and the collection was scattered broadcast. "Rosebud Meredith," said Rickey witheringly, "it would

serve you right for putting that toad in the plate if your hand would get all over warts! I'm sure I hope it will." She rescued the fallen piece of bark and announced: "The collection this afternoon has amounted to a hundred dollars and seven cents. And now, children, we will skip the catechism and I will tell you a story."

Her auditors hunched themselves nearer, a double row of attentive white and black faces, as Rickey with a preliminary bass cough, began in a drawling tone whose mimicry called forth giggles of ecstasy.

"There were once two little sisters, who went to Sunday-school and loved their teacher ve-e-ery much. They were always good and attentive — *not* like that little nigger over *there!* The one with his thumb in his mouth! One was little Mary and the other was little Susy. They had a mighty rich uncle who lived in Richmond, and once he came to see them and gave them each a dollar. And they were ve-e-ery glad. It wasn't a mean old paper dollar, all dirt and creases; nor a battered whitey silver dollar; but it was a bright round *gold* dollar, right out of the mint. Little Mary and little Susy could hardly sleep that night for thinking of what they could buy with those gold dollars.

"Early next morning they went down-town, hand in hand, to the store, and little Susy bought a bag of goober-peas, and sticks and sticks of striped candy, and a limber jack, and a gold ring, and a wax

doll with a silk dress on that could open and shut its eyes —"

"Huh!" said the captious Cozy. "You can't buy a wax doll for a dollar. My littlest, littlest one cost three, and she didn't have a stitch to her back!"

"Shut up!" said Rickey briefly. "Dolls were cheaper then." She looked at the row of little negroes, goggle-eyed at the vision of such largess. "What do you think little Mary did with *her* gold dollar? She loved dolls and candy, too, but she had heard about the poo-oo-r heathen. There was a tear in her eye, but she took the dollar home, and next day when she went to Sunday-school, she dropped it in the missionary-box.

"Little children, what do you reckon became of that dollar? It bought a big satchelful of tracts for a missionary. He had been a poor man with six children and a wife with a bone-felon on her right hand — not a child old enough to wash dishes and all of them young enough to fall in the fire — so he had to go and be a missionary. He was going to Alabam — to a cannibal island, and he took the tracts and sailed away in a ship that landed him on the shore. And when the heathen cannibals saw him they were ve-e-ery glad, for there hadn't been any shipwrecked sailors for a long time, and they were ve-e-ery hungry. So they tied up the missionary and gathered a lot of wood to make a fire and cook him.

"But it had rained and rained and rained for so long that the wood was all wet, and it wouldn't burn, and they all cried because they were so hungry. And then they happened to find the satchelful of tracts, and the tracts were ve-e-ery *dry*. They took them and stuck them under the wet wood, and the tracts burned and the wood caught fire and they *cooked* the missionary and ATE him.

"Now, little children, which do you think did the most good with her dollar — little Susy or little Mary?"

The front row sniggered, and a sigh came from the colored ranks. "Dem ar' can'bals," gasped a dusky infant breathlessly, "— dey done eat up all dat candy en dem goober-peas, too?"

The inquiry was drowned in a shriek from several children in unison. They scrambled to their feet, casting fearful glances over their shoulders. The man who had been lying behind the bush had risen and was coming toward them at a slouching amble, one foot dragging slightly. His appearance, indeed, was enough to cause panic. With his savage face, set now in a grin, and his tramp-like costume, he looked fierce and animal-like. White and black, the children fled like startled rabbits, older ones dragging younger, without a backward look — all save Rickey, who stood quite still, her widening eyes fixed on him in a kind of blanched fascinated terror.

He came close to her, never taking his eyes from hers, then put his heavy grimy hand under her chin and turned her twitching face upward, chuckling.

"Ain't afeard, damn me!" he said with admiration. "Wouldn't skedaddle with th' fine folks' white-livered young 'uns! Know who I am, don't ye?"

"Greef King." Rickey's lips rather formed than spoke the name.

"Right. An' I know you, too. Got jes' th' same look ez when ye wuzn't no higher'n my knee. So ye ain't at th' Dome no mo', eh? Purkle an' fine linning an' a eddication. Ho-ho! Goin' ter make ye another ladyess like the sweet ducky-dovey that rescooed ye from th' lovin' embrace o' yer fond step-parient, eh?"

Rickey's small arm went suddenly out and her fingers tore at his shirt-band. "Don't you," she burst in a paroxysm of passion; "don't you even speak her name! If you do, I'll kill you!"

So fierce was her leap that he fell back a step in sheer surprise. Then he laughed loudly. "Why, ye little spittin' wile-cat!" he grinned.

He leaned suddenly, gripped her wrist and covering her mouth tightly with his palm, dragged her behind a clump of dogwood bushes. A heavy step was coming along the wood-path. He held her motionless and breathless in this cruel grip till the pedestrian passed. It was Major Bristow, his

spruce white hat on the back of his head, his unsullied waistcoat dappled with the leaf-shadows. He stepped out briskly toward Damory Court, swinging his stick, all unconscious of the fierce scrutiny bent on him from behind the dogwoods.

Greef King did not withdraw his hand till the steps had died in the distance. When he did, he clenched his fist and shook it in the air. "There he goes!" he said with bitter hatred. "Yer noble friend that sent me up for six years t' break my heart on th' rock-pile! Oh, he's a top-notcher, he is! But he's got Greef King to reckon with yit!" He looked at her balefully and shook her.

"Look-a-yere," he said in a hissing voice. "Ye remember *me*. I'm a bad one ter fool with. Yer maw foun' that out, I reckon. Now ye'll promise me ye'll tell nobody who ye've seen. I'm only a tramp; d'ye hear?" He shook her roughly.

Rickey's fingers and teeth were clenched hard and she said no word. He shook her again viciously, the blood pouring into his scarred face. "Ye snivelin' brat, ye!" he snarled. "I'll show yer!" He began to drag her after him through the bushes. A few yards and they were on the brink of the headlong ugly chasm of Lovers' Leap. She cast one desperate look about her and shut her eyes. Catching her about the waist he leaned over and held her out in mid-air, as if she had been a kitten. "Ye ain't seen me, hev yer? Promise, or over ye

go. Ye won't look so pretty when yere layin' down there on them rocks!"

The child's face was paper-white and she had begun to tremble like a leaf, but her eyes remained closed.

"One — two —" he counted deliberately.

Her eyes opened. She turned one shuddering glance below, then her resolution broke. She clutched his arm and broke into wild supplications. "I promise, I promise!" she cried. "Oh, don't let go! I promise!"

He set her on the solid ground and released her, looking at her with a sneering laugh. "Now we'll see ef ye belong here or up ter Hell's-Half-Acre," he said. "Fine folks keeps their promises, I've heerd tell."

Rickey looked at him a moment shaking; then she burst into a passion of sobs and with her face averted ran from him like a deer through the bushes.

CHAPTER XLII

IN THE RAIN

SHIRLEY stood looking out at the rain. It was falling in no steady downpour which held forth promise of ending, but with a gentle constancy that gave the hills a look of sodden discomfort and made disconsolate miry pools by the roadside. The clouds were not too thick, however, to let through a dismal gray brightness that shone on the foliage and touched with glistening lines of high-light the draggled tufts of the soaked blue-grass. Now and then, across the dripping fields, fraying skeins of mist wandered, to lie curdled in the flooded hollows where, here and there, cattle stood lowing at intervals in a mournful key.

The indoors had become impossible to her. She was sick of trying to read, sick of the endless pacings and purposeless invention of needless tasks. She wanted movement, the cobwebby mist about her knees, the wet rain in her face. She ran up-stairs and came down clad in a close scarlet jersey, with leather gaiters and a soft hat.

Emmaline saw her thus accoutered with disap-

proval. "Lawdy-mercy, chile!" she urged; "you ain't goin' out? It's rainin' cats en dawgs!"

"I'm neither sugar nor salt, Emmaline," responded Shirley listlessly, dragging on her rain-coat, "and the walk will do me good."

On the sopping lawn she glanced up at her mother's window. Since the night of the ball her own panging self-consciousness had overlaid the fine and sensitive association between them. She had been full of a horrible feeling that her face must betray her and the cause of her loss of spirits be guessed.

Her mother had, in fact, been troubled by this, but was far from guessing the truth. A somewhat long indisposition had followed her first sight of Valiant, and she had not witnessed the tournament. She had hung upon Shirley's description of it, however, with an excited interest that the other was later to translate in the light of her own discovery. If the thought had flitted to her that fate might hold something deeper than friendship in Shirley's acquaintance with Valiant, it had been of the vaguest. His choice of her as Queen of Beauty had seemed a natural homage to that swift and unflinching act of hers which had saved his life. There was in her mind a more obvious explanation of Shirley's altered demeanor. "Perhaps it's Chilly Lusk," she had said to herself. "Have they

had a foolish quarrel, I wonder? Ah, well, in her own time she will tell me."

There was some relief to Shirley's overcharged feelings in the very discomfort of the drenched weather: the sucking pull of the wet clay on her boots and the flirt of the drops on her cheeks and hair. She thrust her dog-skin gloves into her pocket and held her arms outstretched to let the wind blow through her fingers. The moisture clung in damp wreaths to her hair and rolled in great drops down her coat as she went.

The wildest, most secluded walks had always drawn her most and she instinctively chose one of these to-day. It was the road whereon squatted Mad Anthony's whitewashed cabin. "Dah's er man gwine look in dem eyes, honey, en gwine make 'em cry en cry." She had forgotten the incident of that day, when he had read her fortune, but now the quavering prophecy came back to her with a shivering sense of reality. "Fo' dah's fiah en she ain' afeah'd, en dah's watah en she ain' afeah'd. Et's de thing whut eat de ha'at outen de breas'— dat whut she afeah'd of!" If it were only fire and water that threatened her!

She struck her hands together with an inarticulate cry. She remembered the laugh in Valiant's eyes as they had planted the roses, the characteristic ges-

ture with which he tossed the waving hair from his forehead — how she had named the ducks and the peacock and chosen the spots for his flowers; and she smiled for such memories, even in the stabbing knowledge that these dear trivial things could mean nothing to her in the future. She tried to realize that he was gone from her life, that he was the one man on earth whom to marry would be to strike to the heart her love and loyalty to her mother, and she said this over and over to herself in varying phrases:

"You can't! No matter how much you love him, you can't! His father deliberately ruined your mother's life — your own mother! It's bad enough to love him — you can't help that. But you can help marrying him. You would hate yourself. You can never kiss him again, or feel his arms around you. You can't touch his hand. You mustn't even see him. Not if it breaks your heart — as your mother's heart was broken!"

She had turned into an unbeaten way that ambled from the road through a track of tall oaks and pines, scarce more than a bridle-path, winding aimlessly through bracken-strewn depths so dense that even the wild-roses had not found them. In her childish hurts she had always fled to the companionship of the trees. She had known them every one — the black-gum and pale dogwood and gnarled hickory, the prickly-balled "button-wood," the

lowly mulberry and the majestic red oak and walnut. They had seemed friendly and pitying counselors, standing about her with arms intertwined. Now, with the rain weeping in soughing gusts through them, they offered her no comfort. She suddenly threw herself face down on the soaked moss.

"Oh, God!" she cried. "I love him so! And I had only that one evening. It doesn't seem just. If I could only have him, and suffer some other way! He's suffering, too, and it isn't our fault! We neither of us harmed any one! He isn't responsible for what his father did — why, he hardly knew him! Oh, God, why must it be so hard for us? Millions of other people love each other and nothing separates them like this!"

Shirley's warm breath made a little fog against the star-eyed moss. She was scarcely conscious of her wet and clinging clothing, and the soaked strands of her hair. She was so wrapped in her desolation that she no longer heard the sound of the persevering rain and the wet swishing of the bushes — parting now to a hurried step that fell almost without sound on the spongy forest soil. She started up suddenly to see Valiant before her.

He was in a somewhat battered walking suit of brown khaki, with a leather belt and a felt hat whose brim, stiff with the wet, was curved down visor-wise over his brow. In an instant he had

drawn her upright, and they stood, looking at each other, drenched and trembling.

"How can you?" he said with a roughness that sounded akin to anger. "Here in this atrocious weather — like this!" he laid a hand on her arm. "You're wet through."

"I — don't mind the rain," she answered, drawing away, yet feeling with a guilty thrill the masterfulness of his tone, as well as its real concern. "I'm often wet."

His gaze searched her face, feature by feature, noting her pallor, the blue-black shadows beneath her eyes, the caught breath, uneven like a child's from crying. He still held her hands in his.

"Shirley," he said, "I know what you intended to tell me by those flowers — I went to St. Andrew's that night, in the dark, after I read your letter. Who told you? Your — mother?"

"No, no!" she cried. "She would never have told me!"

His face lighted. With an irresistible movement he caught her to him. "Shirley!" he cried. "It shan't be! It shan't, I tell you! You can't break our lives in two like this! It's unthinkable."

"No, no!" she said piteously, pushing him from her. "You don't understand. You are a man, and men — can't."

"I do understand," he insisted. "Oh, my darling, my darling! It isn't right for that spectral

thing to come between us! Why, it belonged to a past generation! However sad the outcome of that duel, it held no dishonor. I know only too well the ruin it brought my father! It's enough that it wrecked three lives. It shan't rise again, like Banquo's ghost to haunt ours! I know what you think — I would love you the more, if I *could* love you more, for that sweet loyalty — but it's wrong, dear. It's wrong!"

"It's the only way."

"Listen. Your mother loves you. If she knew you loved me, she would bear *anything* rather than have you suffer like this. You say she wouldn't have told you herself. Why, if my father —"

She tore her hands from his and faced him with a cry. "Ah, that is it! You knew your father so little. He was never to you what she is to me. Why, I've been all the life she has had. I remember when she mended my dolls, and held me when I had scarlet fever, and sang me the songs the trees sang to themselves at night. I said my prayers at her knee till I was twelve years old. We were never apart a day till I went away to school."

She paused, breathless.

"Doesn't that prove what I say?" he said, bending toward her. "She loves you far better than herself. She wants *your* happiness."

"Could that mean hers?" she demanded, her bosom heaving. "To see us together — always —

always! To be reminded in everything — the lines of your face — the tones of your voice, maybe,— of *that!* Oh, you don't know how women feel — how they remember — how they grieve! I've gone over all you can say till my soul cries out, but it can't change it. It can't!"

Valiant felt as though he were battering with bruised knuckles at a stone wall. A helpless anger simmered in him. "Suppose," he said bitterly, "that your mother one day, perhaps after long years, learns of your sacrifice. She is likely to guess in the end, I think. Will it add to her pleasure, do you fancy, to discover that out of this conception of filial loyalty — for it's that, I suppose! — you have spoiled your own life?"

She shuddered. "She will never learn," she said brokenly. "Oh, I know she would not have spoken. She would suffer anything for my happiness. But I wouldn't have her bear any more for my sake."

His anger faded suddenly, and when he looked at her again, tears were burning in his eyes.

"Shirley!" he said. "It's *my* heart, too, that you are binding on the wheel! I love you. I want nothing but you! I'd rather beg my bread from door to door with your hand in mine than sit on a throne without you! What can there be in life for me unless you share it? Think of our love! Think of the fate that brought me here to find you in Virginia! Think of our garden — where I thought we

would live and work and dream, till we were old and gray — *together,* darling! Don't throw our love away like this!"

His entreaties left her only whiter, but unmoved. She shook her head, gazing at him through great clear tears that welled over and rolled down her cheeks.

"I can't fight," she said. "I have no strength left." She put out her hand as she spoke and dropped it with a little limp gesture that had in it tired despair, finality and hopelessness. It caught at his heart more strongly than any words. He felt a warm gush of pity and tenderness.

He took her hand gently without speaking, and pressed it hard against his lips. It seemed to him very small and cold.

They passed together through the wet bracken, his strong arm guiding her over the uneven path, and came to the open in silence.

"Don't come with me," she said then, and without a backward glance, went rapidly from him down the shimmering road.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE EVENING OF AN OLD SCORE

RAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT! — Major Bristow's ivory-headed camphor-wood stick thumped on the great door of Damory Court. The sound had a tang of impatience, for he had used the knocker more than once without result. Now he strode to the end of the porch and raised his voice in a stentorian bellow that brought Uncle Jefferson shuffling around the path from the kitchens with all the whites of his eyes showing.

"You dog-gone lazy rascal!" thundered the major. "What do you mean, sah, by keeping a gentleman cooling his heels on the door-step like a tax-collector? Where's your master?"

"Fo' de Lawd, Major, Ah ain' seen Mars' John sence dis mawnin'. Staht out aftah breakfus' en he nevah showed up ergin et all. Yo' reck'n whut de mattah, suh?" he added anxiously. "'Peahs lak sumpin' preyin' on he mind. Don' seem er bit hese'f lately."

"H-m-m!" The major looked thoughtful. "Isn't he well?"

"No, *suh*. 'Ain' et no mor'n er hummin'-buhd dese las' few days. Jes' hangs eroun' lonesome lak. Don' laugh no mo', don' sing no mo'. Ain' play de pianny sence de day aftah de ball. Me en Daph moght'ly pestered 'bout him."

"Pshaw!" said the major. "Touch of spring fever, I reckon. Aunt Daph feeds him too well. Give him less fried chicken and more ash-cake and buttermilk. Make him some juleps."

The old negro shook his head. "Moghty neah use up all dat mint-baid Ah foun'," he said, "but ain' do no good. Majah, Ah's sho' 'feahed sumpin' gwineter happen."

"Nonsense!" the major sniffed. "What fool idea's got under your wool now? Been seeing Mad Anthony again, I'll bet a dollar."

Uncle Jefferson swallowed once or twice with seeming difficulty and turned the gravel with his toe. "Dat's so," he said gloomily. "Ah done see de old man de yuddah day 'bout et. Ant'y, *he* know! He see trouble er-comin' en trouble er-gwine. Dat same night de hoss-shoe drop offen de stable do', en dis ve'y mawnin' er buhd done fly inter de house. Das' er mighty bad hoodoo, er mighty bad hoodoo!"

"Shucks!" said the major. "You're as loony as old Anthony, with your infernal signs. If your Mars' John's been out all day I reckon he'll turn up before long. I'll wait for him a while."

He started in, but paused on the threshold. "Did you say — ah — that mint was all gone, Unc' Jefferson?"

Uncle Jefferson's lips relaxed in a wide grin. "Ah reck'n dah's er few stray sprigs lef', suh. Step in en mek yo'se'f et home. Ef Mars' John see yo', he be mought'ly hoped up. Ah gwineter mix yo' dat julep in two shakes!"

He disappeared around the corner of the porch and the major strode into the hall, threw his gray slouch hat on the table, and sat down.

It was quiet and peaceful, that ancient hall. He fell to thinking of the many times, of old, when he had sat there. The house was the same again, now. It had waked from a thirty-years' slumber to a renewed prime. Only he had lived on meanwhile and now was old! He sighed.

How gay the place had been the night of the ball, with the lights and roses and music! He remembered what the doctor had said about Valiant and Shirley — it had lain ever since in his mind, a painful speculation. The recollection roused another thought from which he shrank. He stirred uneasily. What on earth kept that old darky so long over that julep?

A slight noise made him turn his head. But nothing moved. Only a creak of the woodwork, he thought, and settled back again in his chair.

It was, in fact, a stealthy footfall he had heard. It came from the library, where a shabby figure crouched, listening, in the corner behind the tapestried screen — a man evilly clad, with a scarred cheek.

It had been with no good purpose that Greef King had dogged the major these last days. He hugged a hot hatred grown to white heat in six years of prison labor within bleak walls at the clicking shoe-machine, or with the chain-gang on blazing or frosty turnpikes. He had slunk behind him that afternoon, creeping up the drive under cover of the bushes, and while the other talked with Uncle Jefferson, had skirted the house and entered from the farther side, through an open French window. Now as he peered from behind the screen, a poker, snatched from the fireplace, was in his hand. His furtive gaze fell upon a morocco-covered case on a commode by his side. He lifted its lid and his eyes narrowed as he saw that it held a pistol. He set down the poker noiselessly and took the weapon. He tilted it — it was rusted, but there were loads in the chambers. He crouched lower, with a whispered curse: the major was coming into the library, but not alone — the old nigger was with him!

Uncle Jefferson bore a tray with a frosted goblet over whose rim peeped green leaves and which spread abroad an ambrosial odor, which the major

sniffed approvingly as the other set the burden on the desk at his elbow.

"Majah," said the latter solemnly, "you reck'n Mars' John en Miss Shirley —"

"Good lord!" said the major, wheeling to the small ormolu clock on the desk. "It's 'most four o'clock. Haven't you any idea where he's gone?"

"No, suh, less'n he's gwineter look ovah dem walnut trees. Whut Ah's gwine ter say — yo' reck'n Mars' John en Miss —"

"Walnut trees? Is he going to sell them?"

"Tree man come f'om up Norf' somewhah ter see erbout et yistidday. Yas, suh. Yo' reck'n Mars' John en —"

"Nice pot of money tied up in that timber! *He* saw it right off. You're a lucky old rascal to have him for a master."

"Hyuh, hyuh!" agreed Uncle Jefferson. "Dam'ry Co'ot er heap bettah dan drivin' er ol' stage ter de deepo fer drummahs en lightnin'-rod agents. Ah sho' do pray de Good Man ter mek Mars' John happy," he added soberly, "but Ah's mought'ly 'sturbed in mah mind — mought'ly 'sturbed!"

The hidden watcher waited motionless. From where he stood he could look through the rear window. He waited till he saw the negro's bent figure disappear into the kitchens. Then he noiselessly lifted himself upright, and resting the pistol

on the screen-top, took deliberate aim and pulled the trigger.

The hammer clicked sharply on the worthless thirty-year old cartridge, and the major sprang around with an exclamation, as with an oath, the other dashed the screen aside and again pulled the trigger.

"You infernal murderer!" cried the major. It was all he said, for, as he swung his chair up, the one-time bully of Hell's-Half-Acre rushed in and struck him a single sledge-hammer blow with the clubbed pistol. It fell full on the major's temple, and the heavy iron crashed through.

Greef King stood an instant breathing hard, then, without withdrawing his eyes from the prostrate form, his hand groped for the cold goblet and lifting it to his lips he drained it to its dregs. "There!" he said. "There's my six-years' debt paid in full, ye lily-livered, fancy-weskited hellion! Take that from the mayor of the Dome!"

There was a man's step on the gravel and the sudden bark of a dog. The pistol fell from his hand. He stole on tiptoe along the corridor and leaped through the French window. As he dashed across the lawn, a startled cry came from the house behind him.

No human eye had seen him, but he had been observed for all that. Run your best now, Greef King! Double and turn how you will, there is a

swifter Nemesis pursuing. It is only a dog, and not a big one at that, but it is of a faithful breed that knows neither fear nor quarter. Like white lightning, without a bark or growl, Chum launched himself on the fleeing quarry, and in the shadow of the trees his teeth met in the ragged trousers-leg.

Kicking, beating with his hands at the dragging weight, the man dashed on. Not till they had reached the hemlocks was that fierce grip broken, and then it was with a tearing of flesh and sinew. Panting, snarling with rage and pain, the man seized a fallen branch and stood at bay, striking out with vicious sweeping blows. But the bulldog, the hair bristling up on his thick neck, his red-rimmed eyes fiery, circled beyond reach of the flail, crouching for another spring.

Again he launched himself, and the man, dodging, blundered full-face into a thorn-bush. The sharp spines slashed his forehead and the starting blood blinded him, so that he ran without sense of direction — straight upon the declivity of Lovers' Leap.

He was toppling on its edge before he could stop, and then threw himself backward, clutching desperately at the slippery fern-covered rock, feeling his feet dangling over nothing. He dug his fingers into the yielding soil and with knee and elbow strove frenziedly to crawl to the path.

But the white bulldog was upon him. The clamping teeth met in the striving fingers, and with a scream of pain Greef King's hold let go and dog and man went down together.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE MAJOR BREAKS SILENCE

TEN minutes later a motor was hurling itself along the Red Road to the village. The doctor was in his office and no time was lost in the return. En route they passed Judge Chalmers driving, and seeing the flying haste, he turned his sweating pair and lashed them after the car.

So that when the major finally opened his eyes from the big leather couch, he looked on the faces of two of his oldest friends. Recollection and understanding seemed to come at once.

"Well — Southall?"

The doctor's hand closed over the white one on the settee. He did not answer, but his chin was quivering and he was winking fast.

"How long?" asked the major after a lengthy minute.

"Maybe — maybe an hour, Bristow. Maybe not."

The major winced and shut his eyes, but when the doctor, reaching swiftly for a phial on the table, turned again, it was to find that look once more on him, now in yearning appeal. "Southall," he said,

"send for Judith. I — I must see her. There's time."

The judge started up. "I'll bring her," he said, and his voice had all the tenderness of a woman's. "My carriage is at the door and with those horses she ought to be here in twenty minutes." He leaned over the couch. "Bristow," he said, "would you — would you like me to send for the rector?"

The major smiled, a little wistfully, and shook his head. He lay silent for a while after the judge had gone out — he seemed housing his strength — while the ormolu clock on the desk ticked ominously on, and the doctor busied himself with the glasses beside him. Presently he said huskily:

"You've had a bad fall, Bristow. You were dizzy, I reckon."

"Dizzy!" echoed the major with feeble asperity. "It was Greef King."

"Greef King! Good God!"

"He was hiding behind the screen. He struck me with something. He swore at his trial he'd get me. I was — a fool not to have remembered his time was out."

A look, wolf-like and grim, had sprung into the doctor's face. His eyes searched the room, and he crossed the floor and picked up something from the rug. He looked at it a moment, then thrust it hastily into his breast pocket.

"I — remember now. It was a pistol. He snapped it twice, but it missed fire."

"He can't hide where we'll not find him!" The doctor spoke with low but terrible energy.

"Not that I care — myself," said the major difficultly. "But I reckon he'd better be settled with, or he'll — be killing some one worth while one of these days."

A big tear suddenly loosed itself from the doctor's eyelid and rolled down his cheek, and he turned hastily away.

"There's no call to feel bad," said the major gruffly. "I've sort of been a thorn-in-the-flesh to you, Southall. We always rowed, somehow, and yet —"

The doctor choked and cleared his throat.

"I reckon," the major murmured with a faint smile, "you won't get quite so much fun out of Chalmers — and the rest. They never did rise to you like I did."

A little later he asked for the restorative. "Ten minutes gone," he said then. "Chalmers ought to be at Rosewood by now . . . what a fool way to go — like this. But it wasn't — apoplexy, Southall, anyway."

At the sound of wheels on the drive, Valiant went out quietly. Huddled in a corner of the hall were Uncle Jefferson and Aunt Daphne, with Jere-

boam, the major's body-servant. Aunt Daphne, her apron thrown over her face was rocking to and fro silently, and old Jereboam's head was bowed on his breast. Valiant went quickly to the rear of the hall. A painful embarrassment had come to him — a curious confusion mingling with a fastidious sense of shrinking. How should he meet this woman who recoiled from the very sight of his face? In the swiftness of the tragic event he had forgotten this. From the background he saw Judge Chalmers lift down the frail form, and suddenly his heart leaped. There were two feminine figures; Shirley was with her mother.

The doctor stood just inside the library door and Mrs. Dandridge went hastily toward him, her light cane tapping through the stricken silence. Jereboam lifted his head and looked at her piteously.

"Reck'n Mars' Monty cyan' see ole Jerry now," he quavered, "but yo'-all gib him mah love, Mis' Judith, and tell him —" His voice broke.

"Yes, yes, Jerry. I will."

The doctor closed the door upon her and came to where Shirley waited. "Come, my dear," he said, and dropped his arm about her. "Let us go out to the garden."

As they passed Valiant, she held out her hand to him. There was no word between them, but as his hand swallowed hers, his heart said to her, "I

love you, I love you! No matter what is between us, I shall always love you!"

It was wordless, a heart-whisper that only love itself could hear, and he could read no answer in the deep pools of her eyes, heavy now with unshed tears. But in some subtle way this voiceless greeting comforted and lightened by a little the weight of dumb impotence that he had borne.

In the library, lighted so brightly by the sunlight, yet grave with the hush of that solemn presence, the major looked into the face of the woman for whose coming he had waited so anxiously.

"It's all — up, Judith," he said faintly. "I've come to the jumping-off place."

She looked at him whitely. "Monty, Monty!" she cried. "Don't leave me this way! I always thought —"

He guessed what she would have said. "Heaven knows you're needed more than me, Judith. After all, I reckon when my time had to come I'd have chosen the quick way." His voice trailed out and he struggled for breath.

"Jerry's in the hall, Monty. He asked me to give you his love."

"Poor old nigger! He — used to tote me on his back when I was a little shaver." There was a silence. "Don't kneel, Judith," he said at length. "You will be so tired."

She rose obediently and drew up a chair. "Monty," she faltered tremulously, "shall I say a prayer? I've never prayed much — my prayers never seemed to get above the ceiling, somehow. But I'll — try."

He smiled wanly. "I wouldn't want any better than yours, Judith. But seems as if I'd been prayed over enough. I reckon God Almighty's like anybody else, and doesn't want to be ding-donged all the time."

He seemed to have been gathering his resolution, and presently his hand fumbled over his breast. "My wallet; give it to me." She drew it from the pocket and the uncertain fingers took out a key. "It opens a tin box in my trunk. There's — a letter in it for you." He paused a moment, panting: "Judith," he said, "I've got to tell you, but it's mighty hard. The letter . . . it's one Valiant gave me for you — that morning, after the duel. I — never gave it to you."

If she had been white before, she grew like marble now. Her slim fingers clutched the little cane till it rattled against the chair, and the lace at her throat shook with her breathing. "Yes — Monty."

He lifted his hand with difficulty and put the key into hers. "The seal's still unbroken, Judith," he said, "but I've kept it these thirty years."

She was holding the key in her hands, looking

down upon it. There was a strained half-fearful wonder in her face. For an instant she seemed quite to have forgotten him in the grip of some swift and painful emotion.

"I loved you, Judith!" he stammered in anguished appeal. "From the time we were boy and girl together, I loved you. You never cared for me — Sassoon and Valiant had the inside track. You might have loved me; but I had no chance with either of them. Then came the duel. There was only Valiant then. I overheard his promise to you that night, Judith. He had broken that! If you cared more for him than for Sassoon, you might have forgiven him, and I should have lost you! I didn't want you to call him back, Judith! I wanted my chance! And so — I took it. That's — the reason, dear. It's — it's a bad one, isn't it!"

A shiver went over her set face — like a breath of wind over tall grass, and she seemed to come back from an infinite distance to place and moment. Between the curtains a white butterfly hovered an instant, and in the yard she heard the sound of some winged thing fluttering. The thought darted to her that it was the sound of her own dead heart awaking. She looked at the key and all at once put a hand to her mouth as though to still words clamoring there.

"Judith," he said tremulously, between short

struggles for breath, "all these years, after I found there was no chance for me, I reckon I've — prayed only one prayer. 'God, let it be Sassoon that she loved!' And I've prayed that mighty near every day. The thought that maybe it was Valiant has haunted me like a ghost. You never told — and I never dared ask you. Judith —"

Her face was still averted, and when she did not speak he turned his head from her on the pillow, with a breath that was almost a moan. She started, looking at him an instant in piteous hesitation, then swiftly kissed the little key and closed her hand tight upon it. Truth? She saw only the pillow and the graying face upon it! She threw herself on her knees by the couch and laid her lips on the pallid forehead.

"It — it *was* Sassoon, Monty," she said, and her voice broke on the first lie she had ever told.

"Thank God!" he gasped. He struggled to raise himself on his elbow, then suddenly the strength faded out and he settled back.

Her cry brought the doctor, but this time the restorative seemed of no avail, and after a time he came and touched her shoulder. With a last long look at the ash-pale face on the settee she followed him from the room. In the yellow parlor he put her into a chair.

"No," he said, in answer to her look, "he won't rouse again."

"I will wait," she told him, and he left her, shutting the door with careful softness.

But the slight figure with its silver hair, sitting there, was not alone. Ghosts were walking up and down. Not the misty wraiths John Valiant had at times imagined went flitting along the empty corridors, but faces very clear in the sunlight, that came and went with the memories so long woven over by the shuttle of time — evoked now by the touch of a key that her hand still clenched tightly in its palm.

There welled over her in a tide those days of puzzle, the weeks of waiting silence, the slow inexorable months of heartache, the long years that had deepened the mystery of Beauty Valiant's exile. In the first shock of the news that Sassoon had fallen by his hand, she had thought she could not forgive him that broken faith. She and his promise to her had not weighed in the balance against his idea of manly "honor"! But this bitterness had at length slipped away. "He will write," she had told herself, "and explain." But no word had come. Whispers had flitted to her — the tale of Sassoon's intoxication — stinging barbs that clung to Beauty Valiant's name. That these should rest unanswered had filled her with resentment and anger. Slowly, but with deadly surety, had grown the belief that he no longer cared. In the end there had been left her only pride — the pride that covers

its wound and smiles. And she had hidden her wound with flowers. But in the deepest well of her heart her love for him had rested unchanged, clear and defined as a moss in amber, wrapped in that mystery of silence.

In the little haircloth trunk back in her room lay an old scrap-book. It held a few leaves torn from letters and many newspaper clippings. From these she had known of his work, his marriage, the great commercial success for which his name had stood — the name that from the day of his going, she had so seldom taken upon her lips. Some of them had dealt with his habits and idiosyncrasies, hints of an altered personality, an aloofness or loneliness that had set him apart and made him, in a way, a stranger to those who should have known him best. Thus her mind had come to hold a double image: the grave man these shadowed forth, and the man she had loved, whose youthful face was in the locket she wore always on her breast. It was this face that was printed on her heart, and when John Valiant had stood before her on the porch at Rosewood, it had seemed to have risen, instinct, from that old grave.

He had not kept silence! He had written! It pealed through her brain like a muffled bell. But Beauty Valiant was gone with her youth; in the room near by lay that old companion who would never speak to her again, the lifelong friend —

who had really failed her thirty years ago! . . . and in a tin box a mile away lay a letter. . . .

" He won't rouse again," the doctor had said, but a little later, as he and Valiant sat beside the couch, the major opened his eyes suddenly.

" Shirley," he whispered. " Where's Shirley? "

She was sitting on the porch just outside the open window, and when she entered, tears were on her face. The doctor drew back silently; but when Valiant would have done so, the major called him nearer.

" No," he panted; " I like to see you two together." His voice was very weak and tired.

As she leaned and touched his hand, he smiled whimsically. " It's mighty curious," he said, " but I can't get it out of my head that its Beauty Valiant and Judith that I'm really talking to. Foolish — isn't it? " But the idea seemed to master him, and presently he began to call Shirley by her mother's name. An odd youthfulness crept into his eyes; a subtle paradoxical boyishness. His cheek tinged with color. The deep lines about his mouth smoothed miraculously out.

" Judith," he whispered, " — you — sure you told me the truth a while ago, when you said — you said —"

" Yes, yes," Shirley answered, putting her young arm under him, thinking only to soothe the anxiety

that seemed vaguely to thread some vague hallucination.

He smiled again. "It makes it easier," he said. He looked at Valiant, his mind seeming to slip farther and farther away. "Beauty," he gasped, "you didn't go away after all, did you! I dreamed it — I reckon. It'll be — all right with you both."

He sighed peacefully, and his eyes turned to Shirley's and closed. "I'm — so glad," he muttered, "so glad I — didn't really do it, Judith. It would have — been the — only — low-down thing — I — ever did."

The doctor went swiftly to the door and beckoned to Jereboam. "Come in now, Jerry," he said in a low voice, "quickly."

The old negro fell on his knees by the couch. "Mars' Monty!" he cried. "Is you' gwine away en leabe ol' Jerry? Is yo'? Mars'?"

The cracked but loving voice struck across the void of the failing sense. For a last time the major opened his misting eyes.

"Jerry, you — black scoundrel!" he whispered, and Shirley felt his head grow heavier on her arm, "I reckon it's — about time — to be going — home!"

CHAPTER XLV

RENUNCIATION

THE grim posse that gathered in haste that afternoon did not ride far. Its work had been singularly well done. It brought back to Damory Court, however, a white bulldog whose broken leg made his would-be joyful bark trail into a sad whimper as his owner took him into welcoming arms.

Next day the major was carried to his final rest in the myrtled shadow of St. Andrew's, At the service the old church was crowded to its doors. Valiant occupied a humble place at one side — the others, he knew, were older friends than he. The light of the late afternoon came dimly in through the stained-glass windows and seemed to clothe with subtle colors the voice of the rector as he read the solemn service. The responses came brokenly, and there were tears on many faces.

Valiant could see the side-face of the doctor, its saturnine grimness strangely moved, and beyond him, Shirley and her mother. Many glanced at them, for the major's will had been opened that morning and few there had been surprised to learn

that, save for a life-annuity for old Jereboam, he had left everything he possessed to Shirley. Miss Mattie Sue was beside them, and between, wan with weeping, sat Rickey Snyder. Shirley's arm lay shelteringly about the small shoulders as if it would stay the passion of grief that from time to time shook them.

The evening before had been further darkened by the child's disappearance and Miss Mattie Sue had sat through half the night in tearful anxiety. It was Valiant who had solved the riddle. In her first wild compunction, Rickey had gasped out the story of her meeting with Greef King, his threat and her own terrorized silence, and when he heard of this he had guessed her whereabouts. He had found her at the Dome, in the deserted cabin from which on a snowy night six years ago, Shirley had rescued her. She had fled there in her shabbiest dress, her toys and trinkets left behind, taking with her only a string of blue glass beads that had been Shirley's last Christmas present.

"Let me stay!" she had wailed. "I'm not fit to live down there! It's all my fault that it happened. I was a coward. I ought to stay here in Hell's-Half-Acre forever and ever!" Valiant had carried her back in his arms down the mountain — she had been too spent to walk.

He thought of this now as he saw that arm about the child in that protective, almost motherly gesture.

It made his own heartache more unbearable. Such a little time ago he had felt that arm about *him!*

He leaned his hot head against the cool plastered wall, trying to keep his mind on the solemn reading. But Shirley's voice and laugh seemed to be running eerily through the chanting lines, and her face shut out pulpit and lectern. It swept over him suddenly that each abominable hour could but make the situation more impossible for them both. He had seen her as she entered the church, had thought her even paler than in the wood, the bluish shadows deeper under her eyes. Those delicate charms were in eclipse.

And it was he who was to blame!

It came to him with a stab of enlightenment. He had been thinking only of himself all the while. But for her, it was his presence that had now become the unbearable thing. A cold sweat broke on his forehead. " . . . for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner: as all my fathers were. O spare me a little, that I may recover my strength before I go hence. . . ." The intoning voice fell dully on his ears.

To go away! To pass out of her life, to a future empty of her? How could he do that? When he had parted from her in the rain he had felt a frenzy of obstinacy. It had seemed so clear that the barrier must in the end yield before their love. He had never thought of surrender. Now he told him-

self that flight was all that was left him. She — her happiness — nothing else mattered. Damory Court and its future — the plans he had made — the Valiant name — in that clarifying instant he knew that all these, from that May day on the Red Road, had clung about *her*. She had been the inspiration of all.

"Lead, kindly Light, amid th' encircling gloom—"

The voices of the unvested choir rose clearly and some one at his side was whispering that this had been the major's favorite hymn. But he scarcely heard.

When the service was ended the people filled the big yard while the last reverent words were spoken at the grave. Valiant, standing with the rest, saw Shirley, with her mother and the doctor, pass out of the gate. She was not looking toward him. A mist was before his eyes as they drove away, and the vision of her remained wavering and indistinct — a pale blurred face under shining hair.

He realized after a time that the yard was empty and the sexton was locking the church door. He went slowly to the gate, and just outside some one spoke to him. It was Chisholm Lusk. They had not met since the night of the ball. Even in his own preoccupation, Valiant noted that Lusk's face seemed to have lost its exuberant youthfulness. It was worn as if with sleeplessness, and had a look of

suffering that touched him. And all at once, while they stood looking at each other, Valiant knew what the other had waited to say.

"I won't beat about the bush," said Lusk stammering. "I've got to ask you something. I reckon you've guessed that I — that Shirley —"

Valiant touched the young fellow's arm. "Yes," he said, "I think I know."

"It's no new thing, with me," said the other hoarsely. "It's been three years. The night of the ball, I thought perhaps that — I don't mean to ask what you might have a right to resent — but I must find out. Is there any reason why I shouldn't try my luck?"

Valiant shook his head. "No," he said heavily, "there is no reason."

The boyish look sprang back to Lusk's face. He drew a long breath. "Why, then I *will*," he said. "I — I'm sorry if I hurt you. Heaven knows I didn't want to!"

He grasped the other's hand with a man's heartiness and went up the road with a swinging stride; and Valiant stood watching him go, with his hands tight-clenched at his side.

A little later Valiant climbed the sloping driveway of Damory Court. It seemed to stare at him from a thousand reproachful eyes. The bachelor

red squirrel from his tree-crotch looked down at him askance. The redbirds, flashing through the hedges, fluttered disconsolately. Fire-Cracker, the peacock, was shrieking from the upper lawn and the strident discord seemed to mock his mood.

The great house had become home to him; he told himself that he would make no other. The few things he had brought — his books and trophies — had grown to be a part of it, and they should remain. The ax should not be laid to the walnut grove. As his father had done, he would leave behind him the life he had lived there, and the old Court should be once more closed and deserted. Uncle Jefferson and Aunt Daphne might live on in the cabin back of the kitchens. There was pasturage for the horse and the cows and for old Sukey, and some acres had already been cleared for planting. And there would be the swans, the ducks and chickens, the peafowl and the fish.

A letter had come to him that morning. The Corporation had resumed business with credit unimpaired. Public opinion was more than friendly now. A place waited for him there, and one of added honor, in a concern that had rigorously cleansed itself and already looked forward to a new career of prosperity. But he thought of this now with no thrill. The old life no longer called. There were still wide unpeopled spaces somewhere where a

man's hand and brain were no less needed, and there was work there that would help him to bear, if not forget.

He paced up and down the porch under the great gray columns, his steps spiritless and lagging. The Virginia creeper, trailing over its end, waved to and fro with a sound like a sigh. How long would it be before the lawn was once more unkempt and draggled? Before burdock and thistle, mullein and Spanish-needle would return to smother the clover? Before Damory Court, on which he had spent such loving labor, would lie again as it lay that afternoon when he had rattled thither on Uncle Jefferson's crazy hack? Before there would be for him, in some far-away corner of the world, only Wishing-House and the Never-Never Land?

In the hall he stood a moment before the fireplace, his eyes on its carven motto, *I clinge:* the phrase was like a spear-thrust. He began to wander restlessly through the house, up and down, like a prowling animal. The dining-room looked austere and chill — only the little lady in hoops and love-curls who had been his great-grandmother smiled wistfully down from her gilt frame above the console — and in the library a melancholy deeper than that of yesterday's tragedy seemed to hang, through which Devil-John, drawing closer the leash of his leaping hound, glared sardonically at him from his one cold eye. The shutters of the parlor were

closed, but he threw them open and let the rich light pierce the yellow gloom, glinting from the figures in the cabinet and weaving a thousand tiny rainbows in the prisms of the great chandelier.

He went up-stairs, into the bedrooms one by one, now and then passing his hand over a polished chair-back or touching an ornament or a frame on the wall: into *The Hilarium* with its records of childish study and play. The dolls stood now on dress-parade in glass cases, and prints in bright colors, dear to little people, were on the walls. He opened the shutters here, too, and stood some time on the threshold before he turned and went heavily down-stairs.

Through the rear door he could see the kitchens, and Aunt Daphne sitting under the trumpet-vine piecing a nine-patch calico quilt with little squares of orange and red and green cloth. Two diminutive darkies were sprawled on the ground looking up at her with round serious eyes, while a wary bantam pecked industriously about their bare legs.

"En den whut de roostah say, Aunt Daph?"

"Ol' roostah he hollah ter all he wifes, 'Oo — ooo! Oo — ooo! Young *Mars'* come! — Young *Mars'* come! Young *Mars'* come!' En dey all mighty skeered, 'case Mars' John he cert'n'y fond ob fried chick'n. But de big tuhkey gobbler he don' b'leeve et 'tall. 'Doubtful — doubtful — doubtful!' he say, lak dat. Den de drake he peep

eroun' de cornah, en he say, ' Haish ! Haish ! Haish ! ' Fo' he done seed Mars' John comin', sho' nuff. But et too late by den, fo' Aunt Daph she done grab Mis' Pullet, en Mars' John he gwineter eat huh dis bery evenin' fo' he suppah. Now you chillen run erlong home ter yo' mammies, en don' yo' pick none ob dem green apples on de way, neidah."

It was not till after dark had come that Valiant said good-by to the garden. He loved it best under the starlight. He sat a long hour under the pergola overlooking the lake, where he could dimly see the green rocks, and the white froth of the water bubbling and chuckling down over their rounded outlines to the shrouded level below. The moon lifted finally and soared through the sky, blowing out the little lamps of stars. Under its light a gossamer mist robed the landscape in a shimmering opalescence, in which tree and shrub altered their values and became transmuted to silver sentinels, watching over a demesne of violet-velvet shadows filled with sleepy twitterings and stealthy rustlings and the odor of wild honeysuckle.

At last he stood before the old sun-dial, rearing its column from its pearly clusters of blossoms. *"I count no hours but the happy ones":* he read the inscription with an indrawn breath. Then, groping at its base, he lifted the ivy that had once

rambled there and drew up the tangle again over the stone disk. His Bride's-Garden!

In the library, an hour later, sitting at the big black pigeonholed desk, he wrote to Shirley:

"I am leaving to-night on the midnight train. Uncle Jefferson will give you this note in the morning. I will not stay at Damory Court to bring more pain into your life. I am going very far away. I understand all you are feeling — and so, good-by, good-by. God keep you! I love you and I shall love you always, always!"

CHAPTER XLVI

THE VOICE FROM THE PAST

THOUGH the doctor left the church with Shirley and her mother, he did not drive to Rosewood, but to his office. There, alone with Mrs. Dandridge while Shirley waited in the carriage, he unlocked the little tin box that had been the major's, with the key Mrs. Dandridge gave him, and put into her hands a little packet of yellow oiled-silk which bore her name. He noted that it agitated her profoundly and as she thrust it into the bosom of her dress, her face seemed stirred as he had never seen it. When he put her again in the carriage, he patted her shoulder with a touch far gentler than his gruff good-by.

At Rosewood, at length, alone in her room, she sat down with the packet in her hands. During the long hours since first the little key had lain in her palm like a live coal, she had been all afire with eagerness. Now the moment had come, she was almost afraid.

She tried to imagine that letter's coming to her — then. Thirty years ago! A May day, a day of golden sunshine and flowers. The arbors had been

covered with roses then, too, like those whose perfume drifted to her now. Evil news flies fast, and she had heard of the duel very early that morning. The letter would have reached her later. She would have fled away with it to this very room to read it alone — as she did now!

With unsteady fingers she unwrapped the oiled-silk, broke the letter's seal, and read:

"*Dearest:*

"Before you read this, you will no doubt have heard the thing that has happened this sunshiny morning. Sassoon — poor Sassoon! I can say that with all my heart — is dead. What this fact will mean to you, God help me! I can not guess. For I have never been certain, Judith, of your heart. Sometimes I have thought you loved me — me only — as I love you. Last night when I saw you wearing my cape jessamines at the ball, I was almost sure of it. But when you made me promise, whatever happened, not to lift my hand against him, then I doubted. Was it because you feared for him? Would to God at this moment I knew this was not true! For whatever the fact, I must love you, darling, you and no other, as long as I live!"

When she had read thus far, she closed the letter, and pressing a hand against her heart as if to still its throbbing, locked the written pages in a drawer of her bureau. She went down-stairs and made Ranston bring her chair to its accustomed place

under the rose-arbor, and sat there through the falling twilight.

She and Shirley talked but little at dinner, and what she said seemed to come winging from old memories — her own girlhood, its routs and picnics and harum-scarum pleasures. And there were long gaps in which she sat silent, playing with her napkin, the light color coming and going in her delicate cheek, lost in revery. It was not till the hall-clock struck her usual hour that she rose to go to her room.

"Don't send Emmaline," she said. "I shan't want her." She kissed Shirley good night. "Maybe after a while you will sing for me; you haven't played your harp for ever so long."

In the subdued candle-light Mrs. Dandridge locked the door of her room. She opened a closet, and from the very bottom of a small haircloth trunk, lifted and shook out from its many tissue wrappings a faded gown of rose-colored silk, with pointed bodice and old-fashioned puff-sleeves. She spread this on the bed and laid with it a pair of yellowed satin slippers and a little straw basket that held a spray of what had once been cape jessamine.

In the flickering light she undressed and rearranged her hair, catching its silvery curling meshes in a low soft coil. Looking almost furtively about her, she put on the rose-colored gown, and pinned the withered flower-spray on its breast. She lighted more candles — in the wall-brackets and on the

dressing-table — and the reading-lamp on the desk. Standing before her mirror then, she gazed long at the reflection — the poor faded rose-tint against the pale ivory of her slender neck, and the white hair. A little quiver ran over her lips.

"'Whatever the fact,'" she whispered, "'. . . you and no other, as long as I live.'"

She unlocked the bureau-drawer then, took out the letter, and seating herself by the table, read the remainder:

"I write this in the old library and Bristow holds my horse by the porch. He will give you this letter when I am gone.

"Last night we were dancing — all of us — at the ball. I can scarcely believe it was less than twelve hours ago! The calendar on my desk has a motto for each leaf. To-day's is this: 'Every man carries his fate on a riband about his neck.' Last night I would have smiled at that, perhaps; to-day I say to myself, 'It's true — it's true!' Two little hours ago I could have sworn that whatever happened to me, Sassoon would suffer no harm.

"Judith, I could not avoid the meeting. You will know the circumstances, and will see that it was forced upon me. But though we met on the field, I kept my promise. *Sassoon did not fall by my hand.*"

She had begun to tremble so that the paper shook in her hands, and from her breast, shattered by her quick breathing, the brown jessamine petals dusted

down in her lap. It was some moments before she could calm herself sufficiently to read on.

"He fired at the signal and the shot went wide. I threw my pistol on the ground. Then — whether maddened by my refusal to fire, I can not tell — he turned his weapon all at once and shot himself through the breast. It was over in an instant. The seconds did not guess — do not even now, for it happened but an hour ago. As the code decrees, their backs were turned when the shots were fired. But there were circumstances I can not touch upon to you which made them disapprove — which made my facing him just then seem unchivalrous. I saw it in Bristow's face, and liked him the better for it, even while it touched my pride. They could not know, of course, that I did not intend to fire. Well, you and they will know it now! And Bristow has my pistol; he will find it undischarged — thank God, thank God!

"But will that matter to you? If you loved Sassoon, I shall always in your mind stand as the indirect cause of his death! It is for this reason I am going away — I could not bear to look in your accusing eyes and hear you say it. Nor could I bear to stay here, a reminder to you of such a horror. If you love me, you will write and call me back to you. Oh, Judith, Judith, my own dear love! I pray God you will!"

She put the letter down and laid her face upon it. "Beauty! Beauty!" she whispered, dry-eyed. "I never knew! I never knew! But it would have

made no difference, darling. I would have forgiven you anything — everything! You know that, now, dear! You have been certain of it all these years that have been so empty, empty to me!"

But when the faded rose-colored gown and the poor time-yellowed slippers had been laid back in the haircloth trunk; when, her door once more unbolted, she lay in her bed in the dim glow of the reading-lamp, with her curling silvery hair drifting across the pillow and the letter beneath it, at last the tears came coursing down her cheeks.

And with the loosening of her tears, gradually and softly came joy — infinitely deeper than the anguish and sense of betrayal. It poured upon her like a trembling flood. Long, long ago he had gone out of the world — it was only his memory that counted to her. Now that could no longer spell pain or emptiness or denial. It was engoldened by a new light, and in that light she would walk gently and smilingly to the end.

She found the slender golden chain that hung about her neck and opened the little black locket with its circlet of laureled pearls. And as she gazed at the face it held, which time had not touched with change, the sound of Shirley's harp came softly in through the window. She was playing an old-fashioned song, of the sort she knew her mother loved best:

"Darling, I am growing old.
Silver threads among the gold
Shine upon my brow to-day;
Life is fading fast away.
But, my darling, you will be
Always young and fair to me."

Outside the leaves rustled, the birds called and the crickets sang their unending epithalamia of summer nights, and on this tone-background the melody rose tenderly and lingeringly like a haunting perfume of pressed flowers. She smiled and lifted the locket to her face, whispering the words of the refrain:

"Yes, my darling, you will be
Always young and fair to me!"

The smile was still on her lips when she fell asleep, and the little locket still lay in her fingers.

CHAPTER XLVII

WHEN THE CLOCK STRUCK

"SORROW weeps — sorrow sings." As Shirley played that night, the old Russian proverb kept running through her mind. When she had pushed the gold harp into its corner she threw herself upon a broad sofa in a feathery drift of chintz cushions and dropped her forehead in her laced fingers. A gilt-framed mirror hung on the opposite wall, out of which her sorrowful brooding eyes looked with an expression of dumb and weary suffering.

Her confused thoughts raced hither and thither. What would be the end? Would Valiant forget after a time? Would he marry — Miss Fargo, perhaps? The thought caused her a stab of anguish. Yet she herself could not marry him. The barrier was impassable!

She was still lying listlessly among the cushions when a step sounded on the porch and she heard Chilly Lusk's voice in the hall. With heavy hands Shirley put into place her disheveled hair and rose to meet him.

"I'm awfully selfish to come to-night," he said awkwardly; "no doubt you are tired out."

She disclaimed the weariness that dragged upon her spirits like leaden weights, and made him welcome with her usual cordiality. She was, in fact, relieved at his coming. At Damory Court, the night of the ball, when she had come from the garden with her lips thrilling from Valiant's kiss, she had suddenly met his look. It had seemed to hold a startled realization that she had remembered with a remorseful compunction. Since that night he had not been at Rosewood.

Ranston had lighted a pine-knot in the fireplace, and the walls were shuddering with crimson shadows. Her hand was shielding her eyes, and as she strove to fill the gaps in their somewhat spasmodic conversation with the trivial impersonal things that belonged to their old intimacy, the tiny flickering flames seemed to be darting unfriendly fingers plucking at her secret. Leaning from her nest of cushions she thrust the poker into the glowing resinous mass till sparks whizzed up the chimney's black maw in a torrent.

"How they fly!" she said. "Rickey Snyder calls it raising a blizzard in Hades. I used to think they flew up to the sky and became the littlest stars. What a pity we have to grow up and learn so much! I'd rather have kept on believing that when the red leaves in the woods whirled about in a

circle the fairies were dancing, and that it was the gnomes who put the cockle-burs in the hounds' ears."

She had been talking at random, gradually becoming shrinkingly conscious of his constrained and stumbling manner. She had, however, but half defined his errand when he came to it all in a burst.

"I — I can't get to it, somehow, Shirley," he said with sudden desperation, "but here it is. I've come to ask you to marry me. Don't stop me," he went on hurriedly, lifting his hand; "whatever you say, I must tell you. I've been trying to for months and months!" Now that he had started, it came with a boyish vehemence that both chilled and thrilled her. Even in her own desolation, and shrinking almost unbearably from the avowal, the hope and brightness in his voice touched her with pity. It seemed to her that life was a strange jumble of unescapable and incomprehensible pain. And all the while, in the young voice vibrant with feeling, her cringing ear was catching imagined echoes of that other voice, graver and more self-contained, but shaken by the same passion, in that iteration of "I love you! I love you!"

His answer came to him finally in her silence, and he released her hands which he had caught in his own. They dropped, limp and unresponsive, in her lap. "Shirley," he said brokenly, "maybe you can't care for me — yet. But if you will marry

me, I — I'll be content with so little, till — you do."

She shook her head, her hair making dim flashes in the firelight. "No, Chilly," she said. "It makes me wretched to give you pain, but I must — I must! Love isn't like that. It doesn't come afterward. I know. I could never give you what you want. You would end by despising me, as I — should despise myself."

"I won't give up," he said incoherently. "I can't give up. Not so long as I know there's nobody else. At the ball I thought — I thought perhaps you cared for Valiant — but since he told me —"

He stopped suddenly, for she was looking at him from an ashen face. "He told me there was no reason why I should not try my luck," he said difficultly. "I asked him."

There was a silence, while he gazed at her, breathing deeply. Then he tried to laugh.

"All right," he said hoarsely. "It — it doesn't matter. Don't worry."

She stretched out her hand to him in a gesture of wistful pain, and he held it a moment between both of his, then released it and went hurriedly out.

As the door closed, Shirley sat down, her head dropping into her hands like a storm-broken flower. Valiant had accepted the finality of the situation. With a wave of deeper hopelessness than had yet submerged her, she realized that, against her own de-

cision, something deep within her had taken shy and secret comfort in his stubborn masculine refusal. Against all fact, in face of the impossible, her heart had been clinging to this — as though his love might even attain the miraculous and somewhere, somehow, recreate circumstance. But now he, too, had bowed to the decree. A kind of utter apathetic wretchedness seized upon her, to replace the sharp misery that had so long been her companion — an empty numbness in which, in a measure, she ceased to feel.

An hour dragged slowly by and at length she rose and went slowly up the stairs. Her head felt curiously heavy, but it did not ache. Outside her mother's door, as was her custom, she paused mechanically to listen. A tiny pencil of light struck through the darkness and painted a spot of brightness on her gown. It came through the keyhole; the lamp in her mother's room was burning. "She has fallen asleep and forgotten it," she thought, and softly turning the knob, pushed the door noiselessly open and entered.

A moment she stood listening to the low regular breathing of the sleeper. The reading-lamp shed a shaded glow on the pillow with its spread-out silver hair, and on the delicate hands clasped loosely on the coverlet. Shirley came close and looked down on the placid face. It was smooth as a child's and a smile touched it lightly as if some pleasant sleep-

thought had just laid rosy fingers on the dreaming lips. The light caught and sparkled from something bright that lay between her mother's hands. It was the enamel brooch that held her own baby curl, and she saw suddenly that what she had all her life thought was a solid pendant, was now open locket-wise and that the two halves clasped a miniature. It came to her at once that the picture must be Sassoon's, and a quick thrill of pity and yearning welled up through her own dejection. Stooping, she looked at it closely. She started as she did so, for the face on the little disk of ivory was that of John Valiant.

An instant she stared unbelievingly. Then recollection of the resemblance of which Valiant had told her rushed to her, and she realized that it must be the picture of his father. The fact shocked and confounded her. Why should her mother carry in secret the miniature of the man who had killed —

Shirley's breath stopped. She felt her face tinging and a curious weakness came on her limbs. Why indeed, unless — and the thought was like a wild prayer in her mind — she had been mistaken in her surmise? Thoughts came thronging in panic haste: the fourteenth of May and the cape jessamines — these might point no less to Valiant than to Sassoon. But her mother's fainting at the sight of the son — the eager interest she had displayed in Shirley's accounts of him, from the episode of the

rose and the bulldog to the tournament ball — seemed now to stand out in a new light, throbbing and roseate. Could it be? Had she been stumbling along a blind trail, misled by the cunning dovetailing of circumstance? Her heart was beating stiflingly. If she should be mistaken *now!* She dashed her hand across her eyes as though to compel their clearness, and looked again.

It was Beauty Valiant's face that lay in the locket, and that could mean but one thing: it was he, not Sassoon, whom her mother loved!

The lamplight seemed to grow and spread to an unbearable radiance. Shirley thought she cried out with a sudden sweet wildness, but she had not moved or uttered a sound. The illumination was all about her, like a splendid cloud. The impossible had happened. The miracle for which she had hysterically prayed had been wrought!

When she blew out the light, the shining still remained. That glowing knowledge, like a vitalizing and physical presence, passed with her through the hall to her own room. As she stood in the elfish light of her one candle, the poignancy of her joy was as sharp as her past pain. Later was to come the wonder how that tragedy had bent Beauty Valiant's life to exile and her mother's to unfulfilment, and in time she was to know these things, too. But now the one great knowledge blotted out all else. She need starve her fancy no longer! The

hours with her lover might again sweep across her memory undenied. She felt his arms, his kisses, heard his whispers against her cheek and smelled the perfume of Madonna lilies.

She drew the curtain and opened the window noiselessly to the night. Only a few hours ago she had been singing to her harp in what wretchedness! She laughed softly to herself. The quiet night was full of his voice: "I love you! I want nothing but you!" How her pitiful error had tortured and wrung them both! But to-morrow he, too, would know that all was well.

A clear sound chimed across the distance — the bell of the court-house clock, striking midnight. *One! . . . Two! . . .* How often lately it had rung discordantly across her mood; now it seemed a clamant watcher, tolling joy. *Three! . . . Four! . . . Five! . . .* Perhaps he was sleepless, listening, too. Was he in the old library, thinking of her? *Six! . . . Seven! . . . Eight! . . . Nine! . . .* If she could only send her message to him on the bells! *Ten! . . .* It swelled more loudly now, more deliberate. *Eleven! . . .* Another day was almost gone. *Twelve! . . .* "Joy cometh in the morning" — ran the whisper across her thought. It was morning now.

Thirteen!

She caught a sharp breath. Her ear had not deceived her — the vibration still palpitated on the air

like a heart of sound. It had struck thirteen! A little eery touch crept along her nerves and a cool dampness broke on her skin, for she seemed to hear, quavering through the wondering silence, the voice of Mad Anthony, as it had quavered to her ear on the door-step of the negro cabin, with the well-sweep throwing its long curved shadow across the group of laughing faces:

"Ah sees yo' gwine ter him. Ah heahs de co'ot-house clock a-strikin' in de night — en yo' gwine. . . . Don' wait, don' wait, li'l mistis, er de trouble-cloud gwine kyah him erway f'om yo'. . . . When de clock strike thuhteen — when de clock strike thuhteen —"

She dropped the flowered curtain and drew back. A weird fancy had begun to press on her brain. Had not Mad Anthony foretold truly what had gone before? What if there were some cryptic meaning in this, too? To go to him, at midnight, by a lonely country road — she, a girl? Incredible! Yet her mind had opened to a vague growing fear that was swiftly mounting to a thriving anxiety. That innate superstition, secretly cherished while derided, which is the heritage of the Southron-born bred from centuries of contact with a mystical race, had her in its grip. Yet all the while her sober actual common-sense was crying out upon her — and crying in vain. Unknown appetences that had lain darkling in her blood, come down to her from

long generations, were suddenly compelling her. The curtain began to wave in a little wind that whispered in the silk, and somewhere in the yard below she could hear Selim nipping the clover.

She was to go or the "trouble-cloud" would carry him away!

A strange expression of mingled fright and resolve grew on her face. She ran on tiptoe to her wardrobe and with frantic haste dragged out a rough cloak that fell over her soft house-gown, covering it to the feet. It had a peaked hood falling from its collar and into this she thrust the resentful masses of her hair. Every few seconds she caught her breath in a short gasp, and once she paused with an apprehensive glance over her shoulder and shivered. She scarcely knew what she did, nor did she ask herself what might be the outcome of such an absurd adventure. She neither knew nor cared. She was swept off her feet and whirled away into some outlandish limbo of shadowy fear and crying dread.

Slipping off her shoes, she went swiftly and noiselessly down the stair. She let herself out of the door and, shoes on again, ran across the clover. A hound clambered about her, whining, but she silenced him with a whispered word. Selim lifted his head and she patted the snuffling inquiring muzzle an instant before, with her hand on his mane, she led him through the hedge to the stable. It was

but the work of a moment to throw on a side-saddle and buckle the girth. Then, mounting, she turned him into the lane.

He was thoroughbred, and her tense excitement seemed to communicate itself to him. He blew the breath through his delicate flaring nostrils and flung up his head at her restraining hand on the bridle. Once on the Red Road, she let him have his will. The long vacant highway reeled out behind her to the fierce and lonely hoof-tattoo. She was scarcely conscious of consecutive thought — all was a vague jumble of chaotic impressions threaded by that necessity that called her like an insistent voice.

Copse and hedge flew by, streaks of distemper on the shifting gloom; swarthy farmhouse roofs huddled like giant Indians on the trail, and ponds in pastures glinted back the pale glimmering of stars. The faint mist, tangled in the branches of the trees, made them look like ghosts gathered to see her pass. Was this real or was she dreaming? Was she, Shirley Dandridge, really galloping down an open road at midnight — because of the hare-brained maunderings of a half-mad old negro?

The great iron gate of Damory Court hung open, and scarcely slackening her pace, she rode through and up the long drive. The glooming house-front was blank and silent and its huge porch columns looked like lonely gray monoliths in the wan light. Not a twinkle showed at chink or cranny; the pon-

derous shutters were closed. There was a sense of desertion, of emptiness about the place that brought her heart into her throat with a sickly horrible feeling of certainty.

She jumped down from the blowing horse and hurried around the house. The door of the kitchens was open and a ladder of dim reddish light fell from it across the grass. She ran swiftly and looked in. A huddled figure sat there, rocking to and fro in the lamplight.

"Aunt Daph," she called, "what is the matter?"

The turbaned head turned sharply toward her. "Dat yo', Miss Shirley?" the old woman said huskily. "Is yo' come ter see Mars' John 'fo' he gwine away? Yo' too late, honey, too late! He done gone ter de deepo fo' ter ketch de th'oo train. En, oh, honey, Ah knows in mah ole ha'at dat Mars' John ain' nevah gwine come back ter Dam'ry Co'ot no mo'!"

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE SONG OF THE NIGHTINGALE

ALONG the dark turnpike John Valiant rode with his chin sunk on his breast. He was wretchedly glad of the darkness, for it covered a thousand familiar sights he had grown to love. Yet through the dark came drifting sounds that caught at him with clutching hands — the bay of a hound from some far-off kennel, the whirring note of frogs, the impatient high whinny of a horse across pasture-bars — and his nostrils widened to the wild braided fragrance of the fields over which the mist was spinning its fairy carded wool.

The preparations for his going had been quickly made. He was leaving behind him all but a single portmanteau. Uncle Jefferson had already taken this — with Chum — to the station. The old man had now gone sorrowfully afoot to the blockhouse, a half-mile up the track, to bespeak the stopping of the express. He would go back on the horse his master was riding.

The lonely little depot flanked a siding beside a dismal stretch of yellow clay-bank gouged by rains. Its windows were dark and the weather-

beaten plank platform was illuminated by a single lantern that hung on a nail beside the locked door, its sickly flame showing bruise-like through smoky streakings of lamp-black. At one side, in the shadow, was his bag, and beside it the tethered bull-dog — sole spot of white against the melancholy forlornness — lying with one splinted leg, like a swaddled ramrod, sticking straight out before him.

In the saddle, Valiant struck his hand hard against his knee. Surely it was a dream! It could not be that he was leaving Virginia, leaving Damory Court, leaving *her!* But he knew that it was not a dream.

Far away, rounding Powhattan Mountain, he heard the long-drawn hoot of the coming train, flinging its sky-warning in a host of scampering echoes. Among them mixed another sound far up the desolate road, coming nearer — the sound of a horse, galloping fast and hard.

His own fidgeted, flung up wide nostrils and neighed shrilly. Who was coming along that runnelled highway at such an hour in such breakneck fashion?

The train was nearer now; he could hear its low rumbling hum, rising to a roar, and the click and spring of the rails. But though he lifted a foot from the stirrup, he did not dismount. Something in the whirlwind speed of that coming caught and held him motionless. He had a sudden curious feeling that all the world beside did not exist; there

were only the sweeping rush of the nearing train — impersonal, unhuman — he, sitting his horse in the gloom, and that unknown rider whose anguish of speed outstripped the steam, riding — to whom?

The road skirted the track as it neared the station, and all at once a white glare from the opened fire-box flung itself blindingly across the dark, illuminating like a flare of summer lightning the patch of highway and the rider. Valiant, staring, had an instant's vision of a streaming cloak, of a girl's face, set in a tawny swirl of loosened hair. With a cry that was lost in the shriek of escaping steam, he dragged his plunging horse around and the white blaze swept him also, as the rider pulled down at his side.

"You!" he cried. He leaned and caught the slim hands gripped on the bridle, shaking now. "You!"

The dazzling brightness had gone by, and the air was full of the groaning of the brakes as the long line of darkened sleepers shuddered to its enforced stop. "John!"— He heard the sweet wild cry pierce through the jumble of noises, and something in it set his blood running molten through his veins. It held an agony of relief, of shame and of appeal. "John . . . John!"

And knowing suddenly, though not how or why, that all barriers were swept away, his arms went out and around her, and in the shadow of the lonely

little station, they two, in their saddles, clung and swayed together with clasping hands and broken words, while the train, breathing heavily for a resentful second, shrieked itself away into the night, and left only the fragrance from the misty fields, the crowding silence and the sprinkling stars.

The breeze had risen and was blowing the mist away as they went back along the road. A faint light was lifting, forerunner of the moon. They rode side by side, and to the slow gait of the horses, touching noses in low whinnyings of equine comradeship, by the faint glamour they gazed into each other's faces. The adorable tweedy roughness of his shoulder thrilled her cheek.

". . . And you were going away. Yes, yes, I know. It was my fault. I . . . misunderstood. Forgive me!"

He kissed her hand. "As if there were anything to forgive! Do you remember in the woods, sweetheart, the day it rained? What a brute I was — to fight so! And all the time I wanted to take you in my arms like a little hurt child. . . ."

She turned toward him. "Oh, I *wanted* you to fight! Even though it was no use. I had given up, but your strength comforted me. To have you surrender, too —"

"It was your face in the churchyard," he told

her. "How pale and worn you looked! It came to me then for the first time how horribly selfish it would be to stay — how much easier going would make it for you."

". . . And to think that it was Mad Anthony — Did the clock *really* strike thirteen, do you think? Or did I fancy it?"

"Why question it?" he said. "I believe in mysteries. The greatest mystery of all is that you should love me. I doubt no miracle hereafter. Dearest, dearest!"

At the entrance of the cherry lane, he fastened his horse to the hedge, and noiselessly let down the pasture-bars for her golden chestnut. When he came back to where she stood waiting on the edge of the lawn, the late moon, golden-vestured, was just showing above the rim of the hills, painting the deep soft blueness of the Virginian night with a translucence as pure as prayer. Above the fallen hood of her cloak her hair shone like a nimbus, and the loveliness of her face made him catch his breath for the wonderfulness of it.

As they stood heavened in each other's arms, heart beating against heart, and the whole world throbbing to joy, the nightingale beyond the arbors began to bubble and thrill its unimaginable melody. It came to them like the voice of the magical rose-

scented night itself, set to the wordless music of the silver leaves. It rose and swelled exultant to break and die in a cascade of golden notes.

But in their hearts was the song that is fadeless, immortal.

THE END

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